



TACITUS ON IMPERIAL ROME
THE HISTORY OF MAKE-BELIEVE



HOLLY HAYNES

The Joan Palevsky



Imprint in Classical Literature

In honor of beloved Virgil—

“O degli altri poeti onore e lume . . .”

—Dante, *Inferno*

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the generous contribution
provided to this book by Joan Palevsky.

The History of Make-Believe

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University of California Press

BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Haynes, Holly.
The history of make-believe : Tacitus on Imperial Rome / Holly
Haynes.

p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-520-23650-5 (Cloth : alk. paper)
1. Tacitus, Cornelius. *Historiae*. 2. Rome—History—Flavians,
69-96—Historiography. 3. Rome—History—Civil War, 68-69—
Historiography. I. Title.

DG286 .H39 2003
937'.07'092—dc21 2002154935

Manufactured in the United States of America

13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication is both acid-free and totally chlorine-free (TCF). It meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 1997) (*Permanence of Paper*).[∞]

For V. R. R.

But the true record of what happened will give millions of people
an untrue impression of what really happened.

HAROLD NICHOLSON

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Acknowledgments

It is a great pleasure to acknowledge all the people who have helped me during the writing of this book. I am a lucky person to know them and to have benefited from their wisdom, tact, insight, and hard work on my behalf. I dedicate whatever is worthwhile in this book to all of them and accept its shortcomings as the mark of my own. Alain Gowing, who set me on my way, had the courage of my convictions even when I didn't, and gently insisted upon the discipline of scholarly inquiry when I was more interested in the thrill of discovery. His approval of a nearly final draft of this manuscript was a proud moment for me. David Levene read several early drafts and gave me a great deal of frank, meticulous feedback, as well as kindly encouragement. His help was invaluable in those difficult early stages. I thank John Henderson and Ellen O'Gorman, for the extensive and thoughtful criticisms that whipped a baggy monster into some kind of shape; John Marincola, for warm support both moral and academic; Alessandro Barchiesi and Sandra Joshel, for their help with early versions of the first chapter; to Sandra, thanks are also due for the great reading sessions that introduced me to so many important ideas and were the solace of writing agony. I am grateful to Ben Binstock, for skillful emergency surgery in the final stages and a take-no-prisoners style of criticism. With his help I was able to let go of some philosophical dead weight to which I had become too attached. I also owe to him the fabulous Batavians on the dust jacket. Thanks also to Felipe Rojas, for detailed, efficient proofreading and last-minute problem solving; and to Benjamin Sammons, for his thorough and conscientious corrections of typographical errors in the language passages, as well as of my translations. Finally, this book is for Seth Benardete, who showed me that my ideas were something and who always knew all the good lines.

Introduction

Belief and Make-Believe

What an involved style! How obscure! I am not a great Latin scholar, but Tacitus's obscurity displays itself in ten or twelve Italian and French translations that I have read. I, therefore, have concluded that his chief *quality* is obscurity, that it springs from that which one calls his genius, as well as from his style, and that it is so connected with his manner of expressing himself only because it is in his conception. I have heard people praise him for the fear he awakes in tyrants; he makes them afraid of the people. That is a great mistake, and does the people harm. Am I not right, *Monsieur Wieland*? But I am interrupting you. We are not here to speak of Tacitus. Look! How well the czar Alexander dances.

TALLEYRAND 1: 332

When the emperor Napoleon deflects his interlocutors Goethe and Wieland from the politically tricky subject of Tacitean style, he gives the appearance of a polite conversationalist who has almost forgotten his manners.¹ Although the elegance of the czar Alexander is a more appropriate subject for party talk, the emperor's observations, the one about historiography and the other about a historical figure, have everything in common, both with one another and with the subject of Tacitean historiography as a whole. The stakes of this conversation lie in the relationship between style and content in historiography, as Napoleon finds subversive the way Tacitus puts the two together: he writes obscurely, and he undermines the power of tyrants. From this sensitive topic, Napoleon moves smoothly along to the style of the dancing czar. This tableau is presumably enhanced by the fact of the czar's position, although Napoleon calls attention only to his style. Splitting apart form from content, if we may call the historical person and title of the czar "content," Napoleon downplays the authoritarian nature of power by concentrating his interlocutors' attention upon the pleasant spectacle that power can make of itself.

The polish of Napoleon's own response to this potentially hazardous conversation underlines his assessment of Tacitus. How Napoleon wields his authority—in this case to distract Goethe and Wieland from further in-

quiry—instantiates the authority itself. He embodies what he identifies as a problem in Tacitean historiography: the uncomfortably close bond between style and content. The style of power, as exemplified by the czar's dancing or Napoleon's literary ability and conversational ease, bridges the gap between ruler and ruled in the form of ideology: that is, society's representation of its relation to a sociopolitical condition. In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the Wizard has power because he looks big and scary, and because people believe he has power. His power is no less real because behind the fake, scary front stands an ordinary person—so long as the fiction is maintained. And even when it is undermined, the magic still works for the Tin Woodman, Lion, and Scarecrow because the Wizard reveals to them the power of their belief in him to make changes in themselves.

Napoleon understands that Tacitus holds up a mirror to the secret of power, not that he reveals the secret of power. He complains that Tacitus makes tyrants afraid of the people, not that he shows people the truth about tyrants. In other words, Napoleon sees the importance of the people to the construct of power: whatever appearance power has derives in large measure from what its public makes of it. Thus Napoleon's account of Tacitus suggests that narrative is history, insofar as it captures ideology in the nexus of style and content. These two form a single entity that gives the reader the experience of making up, and then believing in, the same ideological fictions as the historical actors in the text.

Napoleon's skills as a literary critic, which differ little from his shrewd conversational strategy, encapsulate some of the major questions that the study of historiography raises. How do rhetorical practices contribute to making history meaningful, and what does the rhetorical operation illustrate about the relationship between past and present realities? The way Tacitean rhetoric makes sense of history clearly provokes Napoleon's anxiety about contemporary relationships of power, although the two cultures have different ideas of how history should be studied. Also, Napoleon seems to think that Tacitus's style bears directly upon his way of thinking, and that it has a direct effect upon the social hierarchy. His unease therefore originates in his unstated belief that style in historiography plays an important role in shaping attitudes and events in history.² The significance of the relationship of style to content marks the point of departure for this book, in which I argue that literary analysis, while indispensable to the interpretation of historiography, is inadequate unless it incorporates investigation into the experience of a lived, historical reality. In his history of ideology, Tacitus gives us ample ground for both analysis and investigation.

1 An Anatomy of Make-Believe

This chapter introduces the main themes of this book through analysis of passages from the *Histories* and other parts of the Tacitean corpus. Each passage illustrates a facet of the relationship between Roman beliefs about reality during the early Empire and Tacitus's representation of those beliefs. My thesis is that Tacitus unifies the style and content of his historiography in order to produce in the reader the experience of believing and understanding as the actors in the text do. History for Tacitus is what the agents and patients of past events believed it to be; where he is paradoxical or confusing, he reproduces paradoxes and confusion within the ideology of the period. Because he draws attention to reality as neither subjective nor objective, Tacitus's merging of style and content illustrates an ideological process that in his parlance consists of "making things up and believing them," where the subjective styling of reality is coterminous with the objective interpretation of it. Tacitus uses the verbal pair *fingere* and *credere* at strategic points in his narrative to illustrate this process.

This book traces Tacitus's development of the *fingere/credere* dynamic both backward and (slightly) forward from the year A.D. 69. The *Histories* shows that the death of Nero deprived Rome of the symbolic fiction of power established by Augustus. The make-believe involved in emperor deification spreads throughout the Empire and gains greater purchase on the public imagination. Tacitus suggests that a phenomenon tightly controlled by the Julio-Claudians (to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the emperor) expands and, in 69, produces a multitude of effects both bizarre and bloody: false Neros popping up all over the Empire; emperors who mistake battlegrounds for gladiatorial arenas; a public that watches the sack of Rome by Romans as if it were a spectacle. The danger of make-believe is that it erases the distinction between images and nonimages. If well or-

chestrated, as by Augustus, it consolidates the power of the tyrant as the dream of the people; if allowed to run riot, it destroys the equilibrium of symbolic order, producing panic and violence.

It is hard to do justice to Tacitus's development of make-believe, since it is not linear or progressive. He begins with the *Histories*, with Nero's absence and *in medias res*, as the problem of make-believe is by this era full-blown. He works forward through the Flavians and then backward, in the *Annals*, to the Julio-Claudians. The historical chronology of the two texts is interrupted by the very slight gap between the death of Nero and the beginning of the year 69; also by his proposals to treat Augustus and Nerva/Trajan at some later date. In an attempt to sort out the logic of these difficulties without losing track of their importance to the narrative, I follow the trajectory of the *Histories* through the four emperors Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian, arguing that each represents a stage in the development of the *fingere/credere* dynamic. In chapter 2, Galba and Otho are paired with what I call the specter of Nero, which represents public disorientation at the imbalance within a familiar ideological structure. Neither of these first two pretenders can overcome its influence. Chapter 3 shows how Vitellius embodies the most destructive aspect of the *fingere/credere* paradigm: a gaze that turns the images of an already distorted ideology into images at the second remove. Chapter 4 argues that Vespasian sets these distortions right and that Roman ideology enters a new phase—that of *superstitio*—in which Roman society legitimates the princeps as a military dictator by believing he has literal, godlike powers. A new perspective represses the oxymoronic quality of make-believe that had always threatened ideological stability, and offloads this repressed element onto another culture: Jews, and, as I argue in chapter 5, Batavians.

OTHO BIDS ROME FAREWELL

In the concluding scene of *Histories* 1 (89–90), Otho leaves Rome for northern Italy, after a successful coup against his predecessor Galba, in order to fight Vitellius, his rival for power. Tacitus leaves us in no doubt as to the severity of the undertaking, reminding us that previous wars had affected the Caesars most, while the common man remained relatively unscathed. Now, however, the levies of so many troops for this civil war create hardships all around. Unlike Nero in the face of revolt, Otho is so eager to be off that he refuses to wait for the completion of a certain religious

ceremony, entrusts the city formally to the Senate, and calls together the whole populace for his valedictory address.

Given the narrative buildup, as well as the rather shaky position of Otho himself, this would be a good moment for him to rally his people and consolidate his power. We know from previous speeches in book 1 that he is a persuasive orator. Yet Tacitus makes only a short narrative summary of the speech (1.90.2). In it, Otho calls on the dignity of the city, the accord between Senate and people, and the ignorance rather than temerity of the legions who have sworn against him. Of Vitellius he says very little, whether from self-control (*moderatio*) or, an alternative that Tacitus strongly advances, because his speechwriter does not wish to incriminate himself in case Vitellius returns as the victor.¹ Tacitus implies that the speechwriter is a man named Galerius Trachalus, a popular orator whose style is generally recognized for its expansiveness and resonance (*genus . . . orandi . . . latum et sonans*). The people gathered for Otho's speech applaud him with false adulation, which Tacitus describes as a habit: *clamor vocesque volgi ex more adulandi nimiae et falsae* ("The cheers and cries of the crowd were excessive and false, from the habit of adulation").

Studies of the *Histories*, most notably Elizabeth Keitel's extensive surveys of the speeches, tend to pass over this incident, presumably because the speech in question occupies so little of the narrative and seems so insignificant.² Yet its very insignificance stands out at this crucial narrative juncture. Otho's rhetoric is formulaic, and we have heard it before in his speech to the praetorian guard, following their riot (1.83–84). There, he excuses the soldiers' behavior, saying, "Your excessive devotion more keenly than cautiously excited [the riot]," just as the valedictory address excuses the traitorous legions. He also links the splendor of the capital with its dependence upon the Senate, which he asks the praetorians to remember is on their side in the war against Vitellius, as the valedictory address adduces the support of Senate and people as proof of Otho's position. Except for the middle part of the speech to the praetorian guard, which mentions Vitellius in derogatory terms, the valedictory address could be a very abbreviated précis of the earlier speech.

In fact, Otho's ability to speak in his own voice has dwindled throughout the course of book 1, from an idiosyncratic call to arms at 1.37 that greatly appeals to the praetorians and that addresses directly the problem of misuses of language, to his pacifying speech to the post-riot praetorians at 1.83, in which his hostility toward Vitellius is all but buried beneath familiar rhetoric, to the collapse of all individual sentiment in this short

summary in indirect statement (the other two being direct) at 1.90. The rhetoric is familiar because it represents the party line since Augustus: self-effacement, aggrandizement of the city and Senate, *clementia*. The more imperial power Otho attains, the farther he is removed from himself, and the split level of the valedictory speech represents both his dependence upon a speechwriter who uses this imperial rhetoric as a code to Vitellius—"Don't blame me, I'm just the speechwriter"—and the predicament of a usurper to the Julio-Claudian order. Otho begins his short term of popularity by speaking in his own voice but ends up talking like a Julio-Claudian. If the principate as established by Augustus is a fiction—the narrative of Republic masking the rupture with Republic, an image standing in for the real—then he and the other pretenders of 69 are images standing in for images: simulacra.³

Heinz Heubner comments (on 1.90.2) that Otho uses Trachalus as a speechwriter in the same way that Nero used Seneca, and refers to *Annals* 13.3, and that Domitian used speechwriters, which we find attested in Suetonius *Domitianus* 20. Suetonius is simply commenting on Domitian's lack of interest in literary pursuits. But there is a marked and significant difference between Tacitus's Otho/Trachalus speech and his Nero/Seneca one. Nero reads a speech of Seneca's at the deification of Claudius, in which Seneca refers to Claudius's "foresight and wisdom" (*providentiam sapientiamque*), at which, Tacitus tells us, "nobody could help laughing" (*nemo risui temperare*). Seneca has written something both appropriate and inappropriate: appropriate for the occasion of a deification, but inappropriate because everyone knows his words are not true. These words reflect the deification itself: a fiction that was also a reality. The difference between Seneca/Nero's speech and that of Trachalus/Otho is that Nero's audience shows an awareness of the fiction in which it participates, and that is why it laughs. However, the audience also likes the speech: as Tacitus tells us, Seneca had "a talent . . . fitted to the audience of that time" (*ingenium . . . temporis eius auribus accommodatum*). The members of Nero's audience may think themselves outside the fiction, laughing at it, but Tacitus, or rather the narrator, undercuts this illusion. They are as much a part of it as they are able to comment on it; indeed, they comment on it *within its own context*, deriding it within the sphere of liking and approving of what Tacitus implies constitutes a whole genre or era of rhetoric.

By contrast with the audience in the Nero/Seneca narrative, Otho's is presented with a situation in which the fiction of Julio-Claudian power has yielded to the simulacrum of power displayed by the pretenders of 69. The Julio-Claudian audience still has a point of reference (i.e., a real Julio-

Claudian), which is why it can recognize and laugh at the absurdity of Seneca's fiction even as it participates in it. But Otho has become a pretend Julio-Claudian: his audience has lost the possibility, open to the senators at Nero's funeral oration, of perceiving the joke at all. Nowhere in the *Histories* does anybody laugh. Galba, Otho, and Vitellius are like holograms projected onto a stage left empty by Nero in particular, and by the Julio-Claudian regime in general. Only the acclamation of the crowd gives substance to their actions, but the crowd's relation to the stage is disoriented by the loss of the familiar fiction. At the end of the chapter, it applauds Otho: *quasi dictatorem Caesarem aut imperatorem Augustum prosequerentur, ita studiis votisque certabant, nec metu aut amore, sed ex libidine servitii, ut in familiis, privata cuique simulatio et vile iam decus publicum* ("As if they were sending on his way the dictator Caesar or the emperor Augustus, they vied in enthusiasm and prayers, not out of fear or love, but lust for slavery, just as among household slaves each has a private motive [private pretense], and public decency was now cheap," 1.90.3).⁴ It therefore responds to a speech that is a fiction—that is, because Otho did not write it, because Trachalus encodes another message in it, and most of all because it represents the quality of oratory that particularly corresponds to popular taste, like Seneca's speech for Nero. But the response of the crowd matches the fictionality of the speech, if we read *simulatio* for *stimulatio*, which seems to accord well both with the conjunction *quasi* and with Tacitus's larger point about the holographic nature of reality at this moment.⁵ Taking *Caesarem . . . Augustum . . . metu . . . amore* as a chiasmus and contrasting it with *libidine servitii*, we could also infer that the love the public had felt for Caesar and the fear it felt for Augustus were genuine, though displaced onto fictive objects. But for Otho the emotion is conspicuously absent, and only the trope of emotion—applause—remains. In the *Histories*, the crowd too has become a simulacrum.

FINGERE/CREDERE

The term "simulacrum," elevated by Jean Baudrillard to a sociological paradigm, refers to the degraded status of the image in postmodern society. In this age of consumerism and mass production, images have no concrete referents; instead, according to Baudrillard, they mask the fact that no referent exists. Viewed in this way, Otho's crowd has no affect because it cannot orient itself within a familiar symbolic order, but it nevertheless makes the appropriate symbolic gesture. Unlike Baudrillard, however, Tacitus

fully explores the concrete effects of this kind of disturbance to the symbolic order, situating the problem within the dichotomy of the verbs *fingere/credere* ("to make things up"/"to believe"). The concept of "making things up and believing them" is central to Tacitus's narrative. Stylistic phenomena often interpreted as eccentricities are attributable to the dynamic of a narrative scheme based on these verbs. That Tacitus adopts a paradox as his guide for understanding imperial history endows his texts with a logic that is nevertheless not teleological: make/believe is not grounded in an ultimate reality but can undergo as many combinations and reconfigurations as the imagination will allow. It expresses in Tacitean terms the relation to material conditions that a society invents for itself and then accepts as natural or real.

Both the *Histories* and the *Annals* exhibit several instances of impersonation. Two of these, the false Nero in the former and the false Drusus in the latter, employ the juxtaposition of *fingere* and *credere*.⁶ There are also many narrative similarities between the two stories: in both cases, the imposter upsets Achaia and Asia with his charade and an imperial governor steps in to check it; and each man attracts an ignorant following who "invent and believe" his veracity. In the case of the false Drusus: *Per idem tempus Asia atque Achaia exterritae sunt acri magis quam diuturno rumore, Drusum Germanici filium apud Cycladas insulas mox in continenti visum. . . . quippe elapsum custodiae pergere ad paternos exercitus, Aegyptum et Syriam invasurum, fingeant simul credebantque* ("Around that time, Asia and Achaia were terrified by a rumor that was rapid more than it was long-lasting: that Drusus the son of Germanicus had been seen in the Cyclades islands and then on the mainland. For in fact people invented—and believed—that he had escaped from prison and was coming to his father's armies, ready to invade Egypt and Syria," *Ann.* 5.10). Compare with that of the false Nero: *Sub idem tempus Achaia atque Asia falso exterritae, velut Nero adventaret, vario super exitu eius rumore eoque pluribus vivere eum fingentibus credentibusque* ("Around the same time, Asia and Achaia were terrified by an imposter, as if Nero was on his way, because there had been various stories about his death, and for this reason all the more people no sooner invented than believed that he was still alive," *Hist.* 2.8.1).

These stories, alike in some important respects, differ in the immediacy with which each of the imposters is presented. "Drusus" exists only as a rumor, a story standing in for a person; whereas "Nero" is a person standing in for a person. The *Annals* narrative presents no complications for the existence of a real Drusus. The *Histories* makes it as difficult as possible for

us to locate a real Nero: there is someone—a *falso*—in his place; Achaia and Asia are not terrified *that Nero has come*, as they are at the rumor of Drusus's advent, but rather *as if* he has come. The rumors are not about Nero, but about his death: perhaps he died, perhaps not. Finally, people "invent and believe" that Drusus is on his way to invade Egypt and Syria, whereas about Nero they "invent and believe" that he is still alive.

Both of these "false Caesars" present a real threat to the symbolic power of the princeps. "Caesar" becomes a title because of one individual's deeds; after him, the title is usurped as a symbol of his authority. Even Julius Caesar's authority is a construct of Augustus's rehabilitation of him through deification, performed to legitimate the criminal actions that won Augustus his position. But there is no legitimate principle by which the principate changes hands; in theory, anyone could take it. These imposters therefore represent more than provincial rebellion, which in itself is not difficult to dispatch; more importantly, they expose the fiction of legitimacy that the title of Caesar bestows. This fiction requires a particular response from the public: people must participate in the make-believe (*fingere*) that consolidates Caesar's power, but they must also accept it as real (*credere*) if the social consciousness is not to suffer schizophrenic trauma. The *Annals* depicts a balance between these two psychological states, as the people make up and then believe in the chimera of a Caesar, who, *qua* Caesar, is himself a fiction. But the *Histories* suggests that by 69, the process has attached itself to the chimera of a chimera: that is, the object of imposture, Nero, unlike Drusus, actually manifests himself through imposture. Nero exists because people invent and believe that he still lives. The balance between *fingere* and *credere* is maintained, but with a vacuum as its object.

Another important example of make-believe does not explicitly involve the pairing of these verbs but draws out the implication of their juxtaposition by means of a joke. This too is the story of an imposter: after the death of Augustus, Clemens, a former slave of Agrippa Postumus, tries secretly to smuggle his master off the island of Planasia and convey him to the armies in Germany. When he realizes that he is too late and Agrippa is already dead, he himself pretends to be the murdered man and travels about collecting support. His efforts are successful, and even people in Rome believe that he is the real Agrippa (*credebatur Romae*, 2.40.2). Tiberius worries a great deal about how to deal with the man: whether to call on the army or let the rumors peter out; whether this represents a serious emergency, or no big deal. In the end, he entrusts the matter to Sallustius Crispus, who has the man arrested and brought before Tiberius. In answer to the latter's question "How were you made Agrippa?" Clemens answers:

"In the same way that you were made Caesar" (*percontanti Tiberio quo modo Agrippa factus esset respondisse fertur 'quo modo tu Caesar,'* 2.40.17–19).⁷

This story illustrates the threat with which Clemens confronts Tiberius. Initially, he hopes to foster a coup by which Agrippa could usurp Tiberius. But the lack of Agrippa seems to make little difference to the progress of the movement; it is enough that Clemens resembles his former master in age and appearance and makes only nighttime appearances. By the time Crispus arrests him, he has a huge following (*multitudo ingens*) at Ostia and from there is received in Rome. The exchange between Clemens and Tiberius therefore signifies on several levels. The nuances are impossible to translate into English, as *quo modo Agrippa factus esset* can mean either "how he had become Agrippa" or "how he had been made Agrippa." The latter suggests that Tiberius's position as "Caesar" is as constructed as his own imposture of Agrippa (i.e., an instance of *fingere*); the former, that one consolidates one's role, presumably by accruing credibility (i.e., *credere*). In this case, it is tempting to change the punctuation of Clemens's reply to read *quo modo tu Caesar?* ("How did you get to be Caesar?").

Paul Plass argues that Tacitus "had a keen eye for such neither-nor gaps [as serious/ludicrous, emperor/slave, legitimate/false] and finds them elsewhere, for example, between war and peace or virtue and vice," but concludes that these reflections do not amount to anything like a coherent philosophy of politics or history.⁸ I argue that Tacitus's observations on these matters do in fact constitute philosophical speculation as to the nature and origin of belief under the principate: he does not tell this story merely to document a contemporary joke or provide a little wry comic relief, but rather to illustrate that the emperor can be openly seen to have no clothes—people know that he is "made-up"—and still wield absolute political power. At the same time, the humorous ambiguity of the imposter's response suggests that a "straight" answer is neither possible nor perhaps even desirable. The belief in the emperor's clothes shelters the body of the Empire too; without it the people cannot sustain their own self-representation.⁹ The false Agrippa Postumus, like the little boy, calls attention to the make-believe that everyone knows about, but in the form of a joke that requires an interaction between emperor and criminal. They may be opposites, as Plass suggests, but the subjectivity of each depends upon that of the other. The joke is that the basis of society is the fiction that sustains both Tiberius and the imposter, but it can be articulated only as a joke, as the whole social network is implicated in it.¹⁰ It is the tension between degrees of awareness of make-believe that expresses itself in Tacitean prose, which is an explo-

ration of the social and political strategies adopted by all strata of the imperial public for suspending itself over the abyss, like Wile E. Coyote in the Warner Brothers cartoon—documentation from the perspective of one who has already looked down.

Annals 2.71 advances a more complex combination of *fingere/credere* when the dying Germanicus tells his friends to seek vengeance against Piso in the Senate: "*misericordia cum accusantibus erit fingentibusque scelestamandata aut non credent homines aut non ignoscent*" (" 'Sympathy will be with the accusers, and men will either not believe those who make up criminal commands or not forgive them' ") This looks like a case in which *fingere* is separated from and negated by *credere*: Germanicus says that those who make up (the evil commands) will *not* be believed, unlike the groups in passages previously discussed, who invent *and* believe. However, it is not the enemies of Germanicus and the Senate that comprise the important party. Germanicus himself manifests the *fingere/credere* dichotomy when he invents and believes in the cause of his death. Nowhere does Tacitus give us an "objective" reason to believe that Piso poisoned Germanicus; rather, he tells us that *persuasio* was what increased Germanicus's illness when he thought that Piso was poisoning him (2.69). When various magic items are discovered in Germanicus's house, he dies very shortly thereafter, believing Piso to be his murderer, though the latter is far away (2.70). *Fingentibus . . . non credent* is therefore the formulation of a man who does not know the difference between the two: his articulation of the situation to the friends around his deathbed constructs a scenario in which the reality of culpability—Piso's and/or Tiberius's—has very little significance. Either the Senate will not believe Piso when he says Tiberius gave him the order, or they will believe him but not forgive him for carrying it out. Those in the first category are like Germanicus, believing that the voodoo, not Tiberius's order, killed him. Those in the second believe that Tiberius did give the order. Either way, Germanicus implies, they will condemn Piso. The relationship between *fingere* and *credere* is sublated in Germanicus's logic to sustain his own paranoid reality, which in turn becomes an early emblem of the *fingere/credere* dynamic within imperial ideology. But the logic of Germanicus's reality also ironically implies the exculpation of Tiberius through the trial of Piso.

The prosecution has much damning evidence about Piso's political behavior, but none that he poisoned Germanicus (3.14), and Tiberius himself has made a distinction between these two charges (3.12). The body of Germanicus either does or does not show signs of poisoning, depending on what the observer wants to believe (2.73); Piso either does or does not have

a document containing incriminating evidence: Tacitus cagily says he has only heard that some people at the time, who were still alive when he was young, believed it (3.16). This assertion is not an “innuendo” or “weighted alternative,”¹¹ but rather a representation of a belief within a wider representational context of the relationship of belief to knowledge, and we must read it through two perspectives: first, Tacitus, or the narrator, who distances himself from the story as much as he can: *audire me memini ex senioribus visum saepius inter manus Pisonis libellum quem ipse non vulgaverit; sed amicos eius dictitavisse, litteras Tiberii et mandata in Germanicum contineri [. . .] quorum neutrum adseveraverim: neque tamen occultare debui narratum ab iis qui nostram ad iuventam duraverunt* (“I remember that I heard from older men that they had very often seen a book in Piso’s hands, the contents of which he himself did not disclose; but his friends frequently said that it contained letters from Tiberius and orders against Germanicus [. . .]. I would assert neither of these things, but I nevertheless could not conceal something narrated by men who survived until the time of my youth”).¹² Tacitus did not hear; he remembers that he heard. He refuses to state anything definite himself, because his aim is to represent perception. Second, the old men who have given him the story: how reliable are they? In fact, the whole narrative is a fabrication, the only possible piece of evidence being the *libellum*. But Piso showed it to no one—it could have been a shopping list. Everything else is a fiction that its inventors eventually tell Tacitus. What we get from him is the fiction of a fiction that people at the time believed. Germanicus and Piso play respectively the protagonist and antagonist in this fiction: their dead bodies, ambiguous in the traces they leave (Germanicus’s of poisoning and Piso’s of assassination), the corporeal sign of *fingere/credere*.¹³

After Germanicus speaks to his friends, he has a little more deathbed conversation with his wife, whom, it is believed, he warns against Tiberius: *Tum ad uxorem versus per memoriam sui, per communis liberos oravit exueret ferociam, saevienti fortunae summitteret animum, neu regressa in urbem aemulatione potentiae validiores irritaret. haec palam et alia secreto per quae ostendisse credebatur metum ex Tiberio* (“Then he turned to his wife and begged her for his memory’s sake and the sake of their children to put anger aside, submit her spirit to savage fortune, and upon her return to the city not to irritate the stronger people with her own ambition for power. These things he said openly, and others in secret through which it was believed that he had shown fear of Tiberius”). Germanicus’s fear of Tiberius directly contradicts his description of Piso and Plancina as *fingentibus*, as he here speaks as if he does believe the emperor gave (or might

have given) the order for his death. In revealing this fear, he aligns himself with the group in the Senate who believe but will not forgive it. However, in giving the speech to his friends and before this revelation, he aligns himself with the group who will not believe the fiction of fatal orders from the emperor, because he believes instead that Piso's voodoo-like practices killed him. Germanicus's belief in these practices is an example of *fingere/credere* and subsumes *fingentibus/non credent* because the latter is articulated by him; he undermines his own attempt to distance himself from responsibility for creating the physical reality embodied in his illness.

In his articulation of make/believe, Tacitus often compares or mirrors the Roman situation with that of foreigners. Germans, as outsiders who resisted Roman hegemony so competently for so long, offer particularly rich ideological possibilities. In the next two examples, the German worship of women (*Germ.* 8.2) and the speeches of Segestes and Arminius (*Ann.* 1.58–59), we see how Tacitus imagines the perspectives of these foreigners as different aspects of the Roman ideological narrative. Through this refraction of ideology, he illustrates the tendency to recognize in the foreigner, or Other, what is obscure to the self, and therefore the Roman tendency to misrecognize systematically its own political grounds. The fundamental misrecognition in Roman imperial society, Tacitus suggests, involves the fact of empire. Julius Caesar was an autocrat, a shock to the republican system. Augustus, on the other hand, immediately and effectively recreated the Republic, making it possible for people to believe that she “was still alive only because she forgot that she was already dead.”¹⁴ He also brought his late adopted parent back into the public eye, only this time as a hero and savior. The repetition embodied in him illustrates the birth of a new symbolic order, founded upon the misrecognition of Julius Caesar as *already* its embodiment. This symbolic order is the equivalent of Tacitus's *fingere*, and his *credere* the belief that the repetition has produced Truth. However, looking down into the abyss, as Tacitus does, means understanding that there is no Truth, no historical necessity, outside of the symbolic.¹⁵

In the *Germania*, Tacitus refracts the Roman narrative of deification within that of the Germans' worship of women: *vidimus sub divo Vespasiano Veledam diu apud plerosque numinis loco habitam; sed et olim Auriniam et complures alias venerati sunt, non adulatione nec tamquam facerent deas* (“In the reign of Vespasian, we saw Velede held for a long time and among many people in the place of a divinity; but a long time ago they venerated Aurinia and several other women, not out of flattery nor as if they were making goddesses,” 8.2). The *Germania* represents to Rome an early stage of itself, with implications of all the problems to come. In

this passage, Tacitus comments ironically on the practice of deification with the chiasmus of *divo Vespasiano Veledam diu* (*diu* related to *dies*, hence to *divus*).¹⁶ By the time of the Flavians, the barbarians have become like Romans: they both invent humans as gods and believe in their fiction. Tacitus implies this process with the participle *habitam* ("We saw Veleda held in the place of a divinity"). The place of the god is empty, but these contemporary Germans both make up Veleda as a placeholder and "hold her to be"—that is, believe that she is—the god (the narrative of the Batavian revolt in the *Histories* provides ample evidence of the awe that Veleda inspired). *Sed* differentiates this time from their early history, when they engaged only in the first part of this process; that is, they worshipped certain women without making a separate category for "woman" and "god," then inventing and believing that the former crossed over into the latter. They worshipped without the pretense of making goddesses (*nec tamquam facerent deas*), even if their worship effectively implied that that was what they were doing. The Germans follow a progression from naive credulity, in which the process of deification was not an issue at all (*credere*), to the simultaneous awareness and repression of awareness of it (*fingere/credere*). In the *Histories*, Tacitus represents the culmination of this progression at 2.8, when he describes the reception of the false Nero as the product of invention and belief.

The false Nero is a convenient metaphor for the symbolic nature of what Slavoj Žižek calls "caesarism."¹⁷ G. E. F. Chilver (on 2.8.4) manifests surprise at Tacitus's explanation of the imposter's real identity—"either a slave from Pontus or a freedman from Italy"—because the two possibilities differ so greatly from one another; he also remarks that Tacitus may be confusing the man from Pontus with a rebellious *barbarum mancipium* whom he mentions at 3.47. However, the lack of identity that Tacitus underlines, as well as the desire the imposter engenders in his public, illustrates how the public's desire for an external object or Other, in this case a Caesar, receives not the fulfillment of that desire but a chimera invented by it.¹⁸ From the early Germans' exemplification of an Arcadian state in which there exists a relationship to an Other (a god, the greatest potential fulfiller of wishes) untroubled by a symbolic split from the self, to the degraded state of the later Germans who now mark the *place* of the absent object with a woman, Tacitus shows us that by the time of the *Histories* the symbolic fiction has become the fiction of a fiction: the people no longer invent emperors as gods; they invent nobodies as emperors. The drama of the false Nero showcases the trauma inflicted upon the symbolic order as constituted by the Julio-Claudians.

Tacitus revisits the German-Roman connection at *Annals* 1.58–59, in the antithetical speeches made by Segestes, a Roman ally, and his son-in-law Arminius, the rebel responsible for the terrible defeat of Varus in the Teutoburgian Wood. These speeches present rival perspectives on the Roman symbolic fiction; as “outsiders,” the speakers situate themselves differently from Romans, but in particular from one another, in the *fin-gere/credere* paradigm. Segestes, forced by his tribe to turn traitor to Rome in that battle and now besieged by Arminius’s men in the struggle against Germanicus, asks Germanicus to remember the allegiance he has shown to Rome and the effort he made to warn Varus about Arminius:

non hic mihi primus erga populum Romanum fidei et constantiae dies. ex quo a divo Augusto civitate donatus sum, amicos inimicosque ex vestris utilitatibus delegi, neque odio patriae (quippe proditores etiam iis quos anteponunt inveniunt), verum quia Romanis Germanisque idem conducere et pacem quam bellum probabam.

This is not my first day of good faith and loyalty toward the Roman people. From the time when I was granted citizenship by the divine Augustus, I have chosen friends and foes according to your best interests, not out of hatred for my own land (for traitors are despicable even to those with whom they join up), but because I thought it best for Romans and Germans to undertake the same endeavor, and thought peace preferable to war.

Arminius, by contrast, rails against his father-in-law’s treachery to his own people, reminds them of their victory in the war against Varus, and rallies them for open war against Germanicus:

coleret Segestes victam ripam, redderet filio sacerdotium hominum: Germanos numquam satis excusaturos quod inter Albim et Rhenum virgas et securis et togam viderint. aliis gentibus ignorantia imperi Romani inexperta esse supplicia, nescia tributa: quae quoniam exuerint inritusque discesserit ille inter numina dicatus Augustus, ille delectus Tiberius, ne inperitum adolescentulum, ne seditiosum exercitum pavescerent. si patriam parentes antiqua malent quam dominos et colonias novas, Arminium potius gloriae ac libertatis quam Segestem flagitiosae servitutis ducem sequerentur.

[Arminius said that] Segestes should cherish the conquered bank and give back to his son the priesthood of men: that Germans would never make enough apology to themselves for the fact that they have seen rods, axes, and toga between the Elbe and Rhine. Punishments were unfamiliar to other nations because of ignorance of Roman *imperium*; so were the tributes; but since Germans have

thrown them off and Augustus, consecrated as one of the gods, and Tiberius the duly chosen one have gone away empty-handed, they need not fear an inexperienced youth or rebellious army. If they preferred their fatherland, ancestors, and traditional ways to masters and new colonies, they should follow Arminius as the leader of glory and liberty rather than Segestes as that of infamy and slavery.

The obvious differences between these speeches are that Segestes' is pro-Roman and in *oratio recta* whereas Arminius's is anti-Roman and in *oratio obliqua*. Segestes emphasizes conciliation between the nations, but he does so as if hostilities had not come first, beginning "from the time when I was granted citizenship." He erases the arrival of Roman *imperium* on German land along with his own status as agent ("I was granted citizenship by the divine Augustus") and shifts the boundary between loyalty and treachery by declaring that his friendship with the Romans is not an example of the latter. In an odd twist of logic, he focuses on what the Romans to whom he gave himself up think, not what his kinsmen might. His motive, he says, is to ensure peace, and throughout the rest of his speech he uses legal terminology as if to argue a case for his good faith: Arminius is a treaty breaker (*violatorem foederis*) whom Segestes brought to Varus as a *reus*. Because of Varus's procrastination, Segestes lost faith in the laws and therefore asked Varus to arrest both Arminius and himself as coconspirators (*dilatus segnitia ducis, quia parum praesidii in legibus erat, ut me et Arminium et consocios vinciret flagitavi*). The night battle fought against Varus was a "witness," which Segestes says he had more power to lament than to avert, after which he chained Arminius and was in turn chained by him (*testis illa nox, mihi utinam potius novissima! quae secuta sunt defleri magis quam defendi possunt: ceterum et inieci catenas Arminio et a factione eius iniectas perpessus sum*). He now insists that he prefers the old circumstances (of Roman subjection) to the new state of revolution, not because he wants a reward but in order to pay for his treachery, and to be the suitable conciliator between Germans and Romans if the former should prefer to repent than be destroyed (*vetera novis et quieta turbidis antehabeo, neque ob praemium, sed ut me perfidia exsolvam, simul genti Germanorum ideoneus conciliator, si paenitentiam quam perniciem maluerit*).

Segestes represents the paradigm of the ideologically constituted imperial subject; to paraphrase Louis Althusser, he recognizes himself only in and through the imperial ideology—one could also say narrative—that spreads along with the influence of Rome.¹⁹ The laws in which he loses faith are Roman laws; he finds himself in the paradoxical situation of acting more Roman than Roman when he demands that Varus deal with the

rebellious Arminius. To press the legal metaphor, he “summons” Varus as if to court for his negligence. Segestes also demands his own chains—that is, his own place in the ideology that binds him. The scene is almost funny, except for the fact that Segestes is in earnest. The distance Tacitus takes from the event creates irony and self-reflection, but Segestes’ attitude itself does not threaten to tear the veil of Roman power.

Segestes’ rhetoric turns primarily on *pax*, a key concept in the Roman imperial narrative that Tacitus counteracts at *Agricola* 30.5 with the famous words of Calgacus, one of the Britons: *auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium, atque ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant* (“Plundering, butchering, stealing they call ‘empire’ with false names, and where they make a wasteland, they call it peace”). In the character of Calgacus, Tacitus comes as close as he can to speaking from outside of ideology. In exhorting his soldiers, the Briton emphasizes how sequestered his tribe has been and how it has never yet even seen domination. But the same degree of removal also emphasizes the Roman construction of the far-flung British tribe: Calgacus refers to his people and home as the object of *fama* that thinks of the unknown as splendid: *nos terrarum ac libertatis extremos recessus ipse ac sinus famae in hunc diem defendit; nunc terminus Britanniae patet atque omne ignotum pro magnifico est* (“This very sequestered recess and fold of legend has heretofore defended us, who are at the edge of the world and of liberty; and every unknown place is believed magnificent”). Tacitus cannot really get outside of himself, and he shows us that Calgacus is a kind of fantasy mouthpiece for him to speak about Roman affairs from as distant a place as possible.²⁰ Segestes, on the other hand, misrecognizes or ignores the ideological functions that give him an identity, and that Tacitus articulates immediately in Germanicus’s response: *Caesar clementi responso liberis propinquisque eius incolumitatem, ipsi sedem vetere in provincia pollicetur* (“Responding with clemency, Caesar promised safety for his children and relatives and a place in his old province for Segestes himself”). Segestes and Germanicus dramatize the ideals of *pax* and *clementia* that constitute the myth of *imperium* and *dominatio*: Germanicus’s “clemency” exists in his giving “back” what was not his in the first place, while Segestes recognizes as “peace” the marrying of German and Roman interests that together sustain *pax Romana*.

Arminius, on the other hand, strives like the Briton in *Agricola* to demonstrate to his people the outline of the Roman fiction. Tacitus reports his speech indirectly to highlight the fact that he is foreign, unlike the direct, and therefore Roman, perspective we receive from Segestes.²¹ In using Segestes to refract the Roman narrative, however, Tacitus both distances

and approximates himself as narrator from the ideology expressed therein. The narrative is therefore split between identification and critique, but culminates in Arminius's exhortation to tear aside the fiction that sustains Roman authority, and that in the end only accomplishes the capture of one prisoner: a pregnant woman, his wife. Arminius also parodies *imperium* when he recalls the Roman standards that hang in the Teutoburgian Wood, a sign of Roman power or conquest that has become a reminder of the German victory over Varus. Further, he deconstructs the *fasces* into *virgae* (rods) and *securae* (axes), emphasizing the corporal punishment that forms one element of Roman *imperium* and that wears the *pax* Segestes clings to as an outer dress—the *toga*. Germans, he says, will never put up with the false marriage of these two within their borders. He exposes the Roman practice of deification (Segestes is to give back to his son the “priesthood of men”—i.e., not gods; Augustus is not “among the gods” but “consecrated among the gods”) and the problem of succession (Tiberius had to be “chosen,” a reminder of all the problems that accompanied the choice), but Germans, unlike other nations, have had firsthand experience of the effects of these fictions and need not believe them any longer.²² Again, his rhetoric underscores the fallacy of *pax*, which is divided between *supplicia* and *tributa*. Hailing his kinsmen as sufferers of that fallacy, he encourages them to use their experience in the service of liberating themselves from it, of calling it by a different name.

Arminius's speech is therefore a mirror for Rome of its own political fiction, and in writing his obituary (2.88) Tacitus is pained that the Romans are not interested in recent events that include his struggles with them: *Romanis haud perinde celebris, dum vetera extollimus recentium incuriosi* (“[Arminius is] not as famous as he should be among the Romans, while we exalt old affairs and remain inattentive to recent ones”). He also tells us that Arminius was assassinated by his own relatives in his bid for royal power, so it seems ironic that a society fixated upon its past should not pay attention to a well-known foe whose death recalls a founding period of its own history.²³ But Arminius's story makes an uncomfortable parallel because it collapses the distinction between the assassins of the kings in pre-Roman history and those of the emperors in the imperial present, challenging one of Rome's most important founding myths and at the same time assimilating the present to an undesirable part of the past. It deflates the myth of Roman history as a progression from tyranny to Republic necessary for maintaining the imperial fiction of itself as a continuation of that Republic. The forgetting of Arminius enables the misrecognition of the regal past, and therefore ultimately the imperial present. In Tacitus's narrative, the

Roman public stays in the republican past as in a dream, so as not to have to awaken into the more threatening present, into the schism between *fingerere* and *credere*, which entails the discovery of its own subjection.²⁴

THE EMPIRE OF THE CAVE

Tacitus's position is that of the critic of ideology, which is not to say that he positions himself outside of it: for him, ideology is history; no alternative vision of an external reality exists in his texts. It is in effect a Platonic vision such as we receive in the metaphor of the Cave in *Republic* 514a–518c, where prisoners sit chained in front of a wall. Puppeteers standing behind the prisoners and farther up a slope, with a fire behind them, dangle artifacts over a parapet, which cast shadows upon the wall. The prisoners cannot see anything except the shadows, to which they apply the speech of the puppeteers, erroneously, since it is only an echo and is not related to the action of the shadows at all. Perhaps most importantly, Socrates gets Glaucon to agree that when the prisoners talk to one another (which they can do, although they cannot turn their heads to see one another), they would imagine that the names they knew for things could properly be applied to what are in fact only shadows.

Glaucon remarks that these are strange images and prisoners that Socrates is describing, but Socrates says: "They are like us." Indeed, it is the work of the *Republic* to explain that comment fully, and to do so Socrates must create both an image (the just city/man) based on an impossibility (Glaucon's initial misguided request), and the condition for demonstrating the radical flaw that makes its existence possible only through misrecognition, or in Platonic terms, opinion (*doxa*). Similarly, Tacitus creates an image of history and simultaneously examines the opinion that keeps it alive. Whether or not the obligations of ancient historiography were different than ours is irrelevant to the deeper philosophical speculation that Tacitus achieves. In other words, the details of the image-making may be more or less accurate, but it is the process of image-making itself that is at stake. And, as Socrates says, the prisoners are *like* us (ὁμοίους ἡμῖν, 515a5)—that is, they may tell us something about ourselves, but not the whole truth, which, according to the logic of the Cave, is inaccessible to anyone. The philosopher is he who remains caught in a dialectic of ascent and descent: he moves upward in the desire for knowledge of what really is, but understands that he can grasp only knowledge of what appears to be, and to do so is to descend.²⁵

If the Platonic analogy is persuasive, the “Did it really happen?” question is misplaced, since the question for Tacitus turns out to be “What is it?” where “it” turns out to be how “it” is experienced or understood. Every detail in his text elaborates an element of this experience, the whole of which comprises his vision of history. The Eleatic Stranger in the *Sophist* describes the mode of representing the answer to this question as “fantastic”; that is, one in which the artist reveals the subjective position from which the illusion (“it”) is created (236b): Τί δέ; τὸ φαινόμενον μὲν διὰ τὴν οὐκ ἐκ καλοῦ θέαν εἰκέναι τῷ καλῷ, δύναμιν δὲ εἶ τις λάβοι τὰ τηλικαῦτα ἱκανῶ; ὅραν, μηδεὶκός ᾧ φησιν εἰκέναι, τί καλοῦμεν; ἄρ’ οὐκ, ἐπεὶ περ φαίνεται μὲν, εἰκε δὲ οὐ, φάντασμα; (“Well then, what shall we call what appears to be like the beautiful on account of a viewpoint that is not beautiful, but if someone were to see works of such size properly, he would say that it was not like the beautiful at all? Since it appears to be like it, but actually isn’t, shall we not call it an ‘appearance’?”).²⁶

The opposite of this “fantastic” mode is the “eikastic” one, in which the artist creates the appearance of an objective likeness. The eikastic is the measure for the beautiful viewpoint that the Stranger mentions in his description of the fantastic; but the beautiful, or objective, viewpoint does not exist. We are therefore left with only the fantastic mode *misrecognized* as the eikastic. Tacitus does fantastics in order to examine the nature of the misrecognition that keeps opinion, or ideology, in place, since this is not an enterprise that admits of a unified narrative. If we do not read carefully, we risk falling into the same trap as Glaucon in the *Republic*, who forgets the experience of his own learning. This experience peaks in Socrates’ demonstration of the Cave, when he indicates to Glaucon the statues of justice, or rather their shadows, that would confuse a man returning from the light (517d8–9). But Glaucon does not recognize in them the same statues that Socrates had charged him with creating at the beginning of their investigation (361d5); if he did, he would not want Socrates to continue the logos of realizing the ideal city, because he would recognize the city as the representation of his own understanding and the Cave as the arena in which it must work. Like Socrates, Tacitus works wholly within the realm of φάντασμα, so that he gets under the skin of illusion and turns it inside out. What is inside is not Truth, but the formations of opinion about it, the representation of which leads quickly to exaggeration and caricature. This mode is pervasive. Although it is in fact the only mode, as I argued above, not all historians (or other imitators) put it on display. When Tacitus does so, he commits to a model in which “history” immediately implies “how people think history,” while his method implies our participation in the

project. Perhaps the ideal Tacitean interlocutor would be Agricola, the “good man” who serves the system but does not understand it, and within the framework of Agricola’s education we witness our own.

Tacitus clearly displays the political implications of “fantastics” in his narrative on the assassination of Junius Blaesus (*Hist.* 3.38–39). Vitellius, ill in bed, sees lights ablaze in a nearby house. Inquiring about the occasion, he discovers that a party is being held for Junius Blaesus, the governor of central Gaul, who had generously supplied Vitellius with an entourage as the latter moved toward Rome (2.59). In so doing he had earned Vitellius’s resentment and envy, which is now fanned by this reminder of his popularity. Lucius Vitellius stages a dramatic scene in which he denounces Blaesus as a traitor who has been boasting of his noble birth and winning over the troops with gifts of money. Vitellius needs no more encouragement to poison Blaesus with his own hand and is said to have boasted that he “feasted his eyes on the spectacle of his enemy’s death” (*pavisse oculos spectata inimici morte iactavit*, 3.39.2).

Superficially, this anecdote looks like another proof of the cruelty and arbitrariness that the principate permits, but that is not a particularly strong reason for including it in this narrative. It will surely be agreed that Tacitus reads as more than just a listing of the evils of the system. However, even the way he introduces the anecdote discourages us from looking much farther: *Nota per eos dies Iunii Blaesi mors et famosa fuit, de qua sic accepimus* (“The death of Junius Blaesus at that time was remarked upon and discussed, about which I have understood the following,” 3.38.1). It is partly the blandness of this introduction that allows him to slip backward in time and assume an apparently objective voice. The story then unfolds: a good man ruined by a jealous emperor. Yet we learn from Lucius Vitellius that this good man was either exhibiting behavior similar to that of all the pretenders, or at least had the means to do so. Whether Lucius is lying or not, it would have been possible, given Blaesus’s situation, to make a bid for power.²⁷ Even in his obituary, Tacitus emphasizes the possibility of a claim at the same time as Blaesus’s loyalty:

Blaeso super claritatem natalium et elegantiam morum fidei obstinatio fuit. integris quoque rebus a Caecina et primoribus partium iam Vitellium aspernantibus ambitus abnuere perseveravit. sanctus inturbidus, nullius repentini honoris, adeo non principatus adpetens, parum effugerat, ne dignus crederetur. (3.39.2)

Over and above the nobility of his birth and the elegance of his character, Blaesus was steadfast in his loyalty. Even when affairs were solid, approached by Caecina and the first members of the

Vitellian party who were now turning traitor, he persisted in turning them down. Untainted and unwilling to cause disturbance, desirous of no sudden honor and certainly not the principate, he barely escaped being thought worthy of it.

Blaesus in fact has two contrary strikes against him: on the one hand, he is a descendant of the Republic and therefore dangerous, because he represents what the system pretends to be and because his lineage gives him visibility as a potential leader. On the other, in such a topsy-turvy system it is he who is responsible for his own death by remaining faithful to a criminal and putting himself on such display as the lighted house represents. At the beginning of the story, Vitellius is looking at Blaesus the insider, the honored guest at the dinner party who is illuminated by his birth and status, from the outside. At the end it is Vitellius who is inside, "feasting his eyes" on the corpse.²⁸ Curiously, Vitellius at first only "notices" the lights (*animadvertit*), although the vocabulary of spectacle increases thereafter: those who wish to inform on Blaesus "watch out" (*speculantur*, 3.38.2) for offenses to the *princeps*; in Lucius's vocabulary, Blaesus "shows himself off" (*se ostendet*, 38.3) as genial and munificent and "looks out" (*prospectantem*, 38.4) from the dining table at the emperor's suffering; the most obvious clue to the crime is the joy with which Vitellius "surveys" his victim (*visendo*, 39.1). Finally (and Tacitus assures us these are Vitellius's very words), Vitellius calls Blaesus's death a *spectata mors* ("watched death"; "spectacle of death").

These metaphors of looking call attention to the mechanics of representation, whereby things in the world assume significance and can therefore be known or recognized. Here, Tacitus plays out the metatextual process of "fantastics" through a story that comes from historical reality; one that turns on the fact that what people know is dependent upon how, not what, they can or cannot see. Through the use of the several actors who focalize Blaesus, Tacitus alerts us to this dialectic of knowledge and ignorance. To Vitellius, who is mostly characterized throughout the *Histories* by his stupidity, Blaesus is initially a point of some interest, but not any significance. Vitellius cannot *see* what Blaesus represents; additionally, the verb used to denote the arousal of his attention—*animadvertere*—connotes "punish." Tacitus therefore both approximates and distances himself from Vitellius: on the one hand, he simply narrates what Vitellius does and confines himself to the emperor's position; on the other, he adds an innuendo that the emperor does not yet have in mind. To the informers, Blaesus represents a great political possibility, and to Lucius Vitellius, a hated rival.²⁹ Unlike Vitellius, both parties know what can be done to Blaesus, as well as what he

could do. Additionally, the narrator chimes in with a commentary on Blaesus's excellent reputation—the reason for Lucius's hatred—and, in the obituary, his loyalty. By the time the narrative is finished, everyone, even the dull Vitellius, knows what Blaesus represents—everyone except Blaesus himself. Although he is the insider, he cannot see out and around him, or he would know that in his situation the two alternatives are to make a bid for power or flee the city. As for the informers, they know enough about Blaesus to recognize a target, but they do not understand why. They find hostile the presence of one who represents what the government still pretends to be: republican.³⁰ To desire his death is tantamount to declaring an autocracy, but that deduction is not made by anyone. From an imperial viewpoint, Blaesus is the *imago rei publicae*, in full view of everyone and yet not known, only seen.

In the relations between Blaesus and the power structure represented by Vitellius and the informers, Tacitus gives us the dynamic of style and content in his narrative: the internal logic of an era ignorant of itself is illuminated when its elements are deployed in a particular way. The difference between, for example, the *Cambridge Ancient History* narrative and that of Tacitus is that the former sorts its data according to its own logic, while Tacitus does so according to the logic of his object. Like Kenneth Wellesley's rewriting of the *Histories*, the *CAH* may give information, but Tacitus makes sense. The style versus content distinction is therefore false, because it omits the element of experience that Tacitus creates out of both.³¹ We are encouraged at first to respond to a story like that of Blaesus with moral indignation, and the historian arranges all the components so as to evoke it: a good and generous man brought down by court intrigue and the arbitrary violence of the *princeps*. Tacitus recreates in us the experience of misunderstanding that characterizes people's attitude toward their own, contemporary narrative—in particular, Blaesus's and Vitellius's misrecognition of their own places in it. He evokes in us the *simulata indignatio* of the senators in their response to Vitellius at the beginning of 3.37. But the political rhetoric that binds the story, raises it to the level of competing political structures, and highlights the image of Republic that results produces the possibility of a knowledge beyond the representation in which we are caught.

Tacitus does not make it easy to find these clues, his reasons perhaps similar to those Rousseau articulates in the preface to his letter to Charles Bordes: "The majority of readers must often have found my discourses poorly structured and almost entirely disjointed, for want of perceiving the trunk of which I showed only the branches. But that was enough for those

capable of understanding, and I never wanted to speak to the others."³² It is important that we experience ignorance in order to gain true understanding, and the narrative therefore reduces us to the level of its actors, to "looking" instead of "seeing/knowing." We must experience the "fantastic" perspective in order to realize that the "eikastic" is imaginary. The extreme nature of Tacitus's language at first creates the illusion of a great gap between style and content, and therefore confuses us. It forces the question about the relationship between the two precisely because the nature of such a relationship is at first impossible to discern. But if we pursue the inquiry, we find extraordinary consistency among his concerns and ways of expressing them: he does not leave us interpretively bereft; he takes us to a state of *aporia*. In this state we come the closest to experiencing the disorientation with which he characterizes the actors in his narrative.

One example of the shared perspective of readers and actors is the Blaesus narrative and its lead-in. In 3.37, Tacitus sets up the connections between Blaesus and notions of the Republic that make the story of his death so significant. First, Vitellius addresses the Senate after hearing of Caecina's defection. The Senate affects concern and disgust at such a betrayal: *dein ceteri composita indignatione, quod consul rem publicam, dux imperatorem, tantis opibus tot honoribus cumulatus amicum prodidisset, velut pro Vitellio conquerentes, suum dolorem proferebant* ("Then the rest, feigning indignation that a consul should have betrayed the Republic, a general his emperor, and one heaped with such great wealth and so many honors a friend, were dragging out their own annoyance as if they were complaining on behalf of Vitellius," 37.1). Here, Tacitus uses the vocabulary of government (*consul rem publicam; dux imperatorem*) in both a straight and an ironic fashion: these are genuinely the words with which people express themselves, but they are also patently ridiculous. To speak of a consul betraying the Republic at a time when civil war rages between various contenders for the purple illustrates the gap between official discourse and actual events, but Tacitus goes further and juxtaposes it with the highly ambiguous term *imperator*, which if understood in its old republican sense would make nonsense in its coupling with *dux* (a "general betraying his general"), and if not, has overtones of the contemporary meaning "emperor" that it had assumed by Nero's time.³³

The chapter then ends with a senator who disgracefully begs for the one remaining day of Caecina's consulship. Some senators laugh at his effrontery; others, knowledgeable about constitutional matters (*periti*), remark that a suffect consul has never before been appointed without the formal resignation of the previous one. Tacitus remarks that the shortness of the

term is not a novelty, as a Caninius Rebilus received the same "honor" when Caesar was dictator. The detail undercuts the senators' objections: concerning themselves with formalities, they avert their attention from the fact that "consulship" has become an honor in name only. The narrative then takes up the Blaesus story, making of him the embodiment of these two small but telling incidents. He represents public denial of the skeleton in the political closet; he is the Republic that does not realize it no longer exists. And his name, "the mispronouncer," could not be more apt if Tacitus had invented it.

To recapitulate 3.37 from this perspective, it begins with several types of simulation: Vitellius's oration, designed for magnificence (*composita in magnificentiam oratione*); the senators' display of *adulatio*; their display of horror at Caecina's defection (*composita indignatione*); and their suppression of malignance toward the Flavians (*nulla in orationes cuiusquam erga Flavianos duces obtrectatio*). Next, Tacitus observes that there were those who laughed at Rosius Regulus's bid for the one-day consulship (*nec defuit qui unum consulatus diem . . . magno cum inrisu tribuentis accipientisque blandiretur*), and experts remark on a nicety of constitutional history. Tacitus aligns us with them in the transition to Julius Caesar, through free indirect speech: *adnotabant periti numquam antea non abrogato magistratu neque lege lata alium suffectum; nam consul uno die et ante fuerat Caninius Rebilus C. Caesare dictatore, cum belli civilis praemia festinarentur* ("Experts noted that never before had there been a suffect consul until the magistracy had been abrogated and a law passed; for even previously Caninius Rebilus had been consul for a day, when Julius Caesar was dictator, when rewards for the civil war were being hastily distributed," 3.37.2).

Nam carries us over into the minds of the senators, who find the piece of constitutional history remarkable, but not the shortness of the term itself. However, their memory of Rebilus appears to carry no baggage concerning civil war or the beginning of the principate, even though Tacitus expressly has them remembering Caninius Rebilus, to whom Julius Caesar had hastily parceled out the one-day consulship as a reward of civil war. They obviously make no connection with their present circumstance or exhibit any degree of self-awareness.³⁴ The reader is encouraged to go along with them; the narrative deceives and misleads. After the senators' reaction, Tacitus might have introduced the story about Blaesus so as to emphasize its connections with the ideology of republicanism, but instead it appears to sidetrack the narrative. *Nota per eos dies Iunii Blaesi mors . . .* has no connective; we are in an entirely different locale; and the story as a whole reads as a self-contained unit. But *Nota* refers us back to *adnota-*

bant, linking this story with the observations of the *periti*.³⁵ Thus what Tacitus has received about the incident (*de qua sic accepimus*) is colored with that era's lack of self-observation, and he has diverted our attention so that we experience this lack; we undergo what we think Tacitus shows us how to avoid. With one hand the magician makes us believe, if we do not vigilantly watch the other.

Yet Tacitus's is not a sophistic narrative that merely plays tricks on its reader; if it were, it would produce in the reader experience without understanding. In that case, the experience would surely be more beautiful, and would produce at least the appearance of understanding so as to satisfy the reader's desire for knowledge. But the prickly narrative that Rousseau describes instead reproduces the process of our own enlightenment, if we can only follow it: what we initially think we see and know, Tacitus shows us to be shadows, in order to educate us as to the nature of our false knowledge, or opinion. The ideology of the principate provides a breeding ground for the kind of opinion that Glaucon has, and the *Republic's* portrait of the tyrant incorporates Tacitus's whole vision of the philosophical possibilities of historical narrative. The tyrant, Socrates says, must fear everyone, including his servants, who will desert or even kill him at the first opportunity (579b3-c2). Compare the following excerpt with Tacitus's description of the death of Vitellius:

Ἄρ' οὖν οὐκ ἐν τοιούτῳ μὲν δεσποτηρίῳ δέδεται ὁ τύραννος, φύσει ὦν οἷον διεληλύθαμεν, πολλῶν καὶ παντοδαπῶν φόβων καὶ ἐρώτων μεστός· λίχνῳ δὲ ὄντι αὐτῷ τὴν ψυχὴν μόνῳ τῶν ἐν τῇ πόλει οὔτε ἀποδηῆσαι ἔξεστιν οὐδαμῶς, οὔτε θεωρῆσαι ὅσων δὴ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ἐλεύθεροι ἐπιθυμηταὶ εἰσιν, καταδεδουκῶς δὲ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τὰ πολλὰ ὡς γυνὴ ζῇ, φθονῶν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις πολίταις, ἐάν τις ἔξω ἀποδημῇ καὶ τι ἀγαθὸν ὀρᾷ; (579b2-c2)

And isn't this the kind of prison in which the tyrant is held—the one whose nature is such as we have described it, filled with fears and erotic loves of all kinds? Even though his soul is really greedy for it, he's the only one in the whole city who can't travel abroad or see the sights that other free people want to see. Instead, he lives like a woman, mostly confined to his own house, and envying any other citizen who happens to travel abroad and see something worthwhile.

Vitellius capta urbe per aversam Palatii partem Aventinum in domum uxoris sellula defertur, ut si diem latebra vitavisset, Tarracina ad cohortes fratremque perfugeret. dein mobilitate ingenii et, quae natura pavoris est, cum omnia metuenti praesentia maxime displicerent, in Palatium regreditur vastum desertumque, dilapsis etiam infimis servitiorum aut occursum eius declinantibus. terret

solitudo et tacentes loci; temptat clausa, inhorrescit vacuis; fessusque misero errore et pudenda latebra semet occultans ab Iulio Placido tribuno cohortis protrahitur. (3.84.4)

After the city had been captured Vitellius was brought down in a sedan-chair to the Aventine house of his wife through the back of the palace, in order that if he should avoid the daylight in hiding, he might escape to the cohorts and his brother at Tarracina. Then, because of the fickleness of his character and (a thing that is in the nature of fear) because all present circumstances are most displeasing to one who is fearful, he went back to the desolate and deserted palace, where even the lowliest of his servants had slipped away or avoided meeting him. The solitude frightened him, and the quiet places; he tried locked doors and shivered at the emptiness. Worn out by his wretched wandering and hiding himself in a shameful corner, he was dragged out by Julius Placidus, the tribune of the cohort.

Socrates' and Tacitus's tyrant share the characteristics of loneliness and fear, because more than anyone they depend upon other people and things for the satisfaction of their inordinate desires. Socrates says that when the tyrannical man attains power, he depends upon flatterers and will himself flatter them to get what he wants (575e), which also particularly characterizes Vitellius's need for approval from soldiers and Senate. Vitellius's last moments recall by opposition the drive to satisfy his former appetites, which in the *Histories* are the dominant aspect of his power; similarly, Socrates' tyrant gains power because of his outsized desires. And Vitellius's attempt to seek refuge in his wife's house recalls Socrates' tyrant, who "lives in many respects like a woman" because he cannot come out into the world; although in the case of the tyrant, the prison is of his own making. So far, these might be the stereotypical characteristics of the tyrant in the ancient literary tradition, which, though they recall the tyrant of the *Republic*, do not necessarily connect Tacitus's directly with him.³⁶ The point of contact between the philosopher and the historian lies in their common observation of the tyrant as the very essence of the regime, or, in Platonic terms, city/Cave.³⁷ Socrates describes the tyrant as one who does what men only dream: he sleeps with his mother, and with beasts and gods (571c9–d3). In breaking the taboos that ground civilization, the tyrant affirms them by negation: the rational part of the soul can believe in the rules that govern the city if there is a tyrannical part to prove they can be broken. Socrates also says that if the city resists, the tyrant will chastise the fatherland (575d); but this is the first time Socrates has ever referred to such an entity. "Fatherland" is a fiction made to sustain a regime, as we learn from the explanation about the "noble lie" intended by the guardians to unify the city

(414c4–415c7). Born from democracy, and the collapse of moderation and education, the tyrant is therefore “the true believer in the lie of the city stripped of everything that made it noble and good. . . . ‘Fatherland’ and ‘People’ tend to be the two slogans borrowed from Right and Left of every tyranny.”³⁸ The tyrant, above all, believes in the fiction of the Cave as a barrier against nothingness.

Vitellius, for his part, represents the essence of the *finger/credere* problem in the *Histories*. As we saw in the Blaesus episode, looking is an important way of knowing for him. But Tacitus never lets Vitellius *see*; only *gaze*. He is the most deluded of all the pretenders, because he is the most taken in by appearances. Thus his eyes must feast, as they do on the dead Blaesus, because his appetite for real power will always remain unappeased, just as the satisfaction of Socrates’ tyrant’s desires comes from the chimera of men’s imaginations. Otho, by contrast, knows how to play the game of make-believe very well; but it quickly exhausts the resourcefulness of one man. If “getting there” means achieving the goal of stabilized power, in 69 it is unreachable. There is no “there” there. In this description of Vitellius, then, Tacitus has realized Socrates’ portrait of the tyrant, and philosophy and history, form and content, become one. It is his translation of Socrates’ call to the still clueless Glaucon: “They are like us.” Glaucon does not know he is already in the cave that he finds so puzzling; Tacitus wants us to figure it out.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND IDEOLOGY

The inescapable and regrettable fact about ancient historians, according to much of the scholarship, is that they made things up. By “making things up,” we commonly mean “falsifying” or even “lying,” both of which are antithetical to the scholar of ancient history and his or her project of arriving at the truest possible account of the past.³⁹ Speaking generally, this view is prevalent throughout the scholarship of ancient history and historiography alike, as the latter does little to combat the dyarchic structure of words and deeds embedded in the discourse of the study of antiquity. Rather, the emerging discipline of historiography has emphasized the rhetorical richness of ancient history-writing and urged us to view the “make-believe” in its own right, as John Marincola’s thorough study of the ancient historiographical tradition states up front: “No attempt is made to evaluate the truth or falsity of historians’ claims; rather, I try to set out the various claims which are part of the construction of the historiographical per-

sona."⁴⁰ Similarly, A. J. Woodman stresses that the techniques of ancient historiography, like realism in the movies, docudramas, and reenactments on news programs, aim at producing something that is "willingly believed," and that this standard of history writing cannot be unfavorably compared with ours because it does not demand the same degree of factuality and authenticity.⁴¹ It is simply something different.⁴²

Woodman's observations constitute a response to Hayden White's theory that historians "emplot" their texts, using literary tropes such as metaphor or metonymy.⁴³ The type of plot (e.g., tragic, comic, ironic) depends upon the use of these tropes. White appeals to other disciplines in both the arts and the sciences for different ways of conceptualizing the past, which, he argues, has no meaning without that which we assign it.⁴⁴ His work pioneered a reconception of the discipline of historiography, and his philosophical and historical speculation on the meaning of the past for the present remains authoritative—in particular, his study of the techniques historians employ to naturalize the matter of their texts, or make it appear self-evident. But what it cannot do is account for the criteria by which one should judge the relationship between form and content in a historiography.⁴⁵ This issue has left White open to attacks by Holocaust scholars, for example, who want to know how a theory such as White's could adjudicate between a "bad" (i.e., Holocaust revisionist) and a "good" account of that period.⁴⁶ White has been able to say only that certain periods of history demand certain narratives; this is a claim that "re-introduces a thoroughly traditional conception of the attested, certain, and identifiable historical event," as Roger Chartier puts it.⁴⁷ Chartier points out the discrepancy between the position White takes on Holocaust issues, and his broader perspective, which deemphasizes the physical and experiential dimensions of a lived reality. He also questions several other fundamental elements of White's theory, not in order to reintroduce the traditional Rankian perspective—history *wie es eigentlich gewesen*—nor to deny the importance of recognizing historiography as text, but to negotiate a connection between form and content that minimizes the reduction of experience to discourse.⁴⁸

Tacitean historiography shapes experience through language. Separating the literary from the historical element of the texts therefore misses the point of his exercise. Branded into his style is the reflection of the way people talk about themselves: the way they represent themselves *to* themselves. His analyses are therefore highly literary in their sensitivity to nuances of language, and historically accurate in their reflection of discourses whose stakes for real people were life or death. Let us recall Woodman's use of the

phrase “willing belief” to describe the kind of credibility sought by both the contemporary penchant for “reality-based” fictions such as recreations of actual police action, and the ancient historian. Woodman’s main guideline for distinguishing ancient from modern historiography—admissability of invented material—has liberated the study of ancient historiography from its previous positivistic incarnations and illuminated the importance of literary aspects of the historical text. However, with this concept of “willing belief” Woodman raises a serious theoretical question that he leaves unexamined: the correlation of the fictive process in historiography to that of ideology, a phenomenon with material stakes and effects in the world.⁴⁹

“Willing belief” in Woodman’s vocabulary appears to be belief that is produced by manipulating the desire for the real through various recognizable techniques; he cites postmodern, media-based incarnations of literary realism. In *Madame Bovary*, however, Gustave Flaubert shows that realism is a technique that ultimately refers back to language, not the world;⁵⁰ moreover, realism is a nineteenth-century discourse inextricably linked with the emergent historical force of capitalism. Both of these items confirm what Woodman implies: that every era manifests certain practices with which it confirms what is knowable, not what is empirically verifiable. It makes up (wills) its beliefs, and then believes them.

Tacitus does not write about the reality of imperial politics and culture, but about the imaginary picture that imperial society makes of its relation to these concrete conditions of existence. He therefore describes a representation of a representation: society’s image of an imaginary relationship with reality. I extrapolate “concrete conditions of existence” from the more narrowly defined “real relations of production” that Althusser argues engender a society’s imaginary self-representation.⁵¹ But Tacitus is not a Marxist, basing historical analysis upon class struggle or economic change.⁵² What is germane, in terms of Tacitean historiography, is Althusser’s assertion that ideology is a “non-historical reality” because its structure and functioning are always the same.⁵³ In this way it resembles generally the concept of the Freudian unconscious. It is not such a stretch to think of the two together, if we understand ideology as the mechanism that turns a reality repressed by the (social) unconscious into a fiction acceptable to its consciousness.⁵⁴ But ultimately the reason that both of these theoretical models are useful for studying Tacitus is their ability to show by their own deficiencies the problems and issues of which he gives a fundamentally clearer and more integrated account. With his style of narrative, Tacitus situates the relationship of conscious to unconscious behavior within the creation of a new, political language in ways that the Marxists and psychoanalysts later recall, but as

discrete elements. As such, the logic of each ultimately fails to account for its necessary relationship with the other, whereas the Tacitean narrative comprehends both positions and integrates them with one another.

I do not wish to gloss over differences between such concepts as the "subject," or the differing social logics, in antiquity and postmodernity, but rather to suggest that within his historical analysis Tacitus locates phenomena similar to those of interest in psychoanalytic and Marxist philosophy. If one may describe his work as a political account of the disappearance of the political, it follows that he speaks of the psychological factors that lead to its repression, the ideological structures that take its place, and the causal relationship between the two. Thus it is not a question of defining the origin of these concepts or attempting to claim that there is such a thing as a Cartesian subject in Tacitean historiography; on the contrary, I wish only to claim that many postmodern concerns arise as elementary to his analysis. Often, where postmodern theories take historical events as metaphors with which to develop abstract ideas, Tacitus develops the theory as ancillary to history.

Tacitean writing often displays the puns, slips of the tongue, and jokes that Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis associate with the momentary eruption of the unconscious. Tacitus's indirect communication is therefore *not* a pessimistic abjuration of making meaning, but a precise expression of ideology via the inextricability of style and content. The structure of the principate plays an important role: not one of censorship (Tacitus himself comments upon the lack thereof in his own era), but because it was itself involved in a complicated game of make-believe.⁵⁵ What Althusser might call real relations of power were in the principate based upon a fiction of Republic and the deification of mortal men.⁵⁶

The concept of "willing belief" therefore describes Tacitus's subject matter rather well, though not exactly in the terms that Woodman intended. If we take Tacitus as our guide, there is nothing to substitute for "willing belief" because it is the very substance of our knowledge of reality. The supposition that the world consists of individuals, their surroundings, and the networks of perception they choose autonomously to develop is not sufficient to explain a text like Tacitus's, unless one chooses to explain its eccentricity as the result of the difference between his type of historiography and ours. On the contrary, the sense of deep political and ethical commitment coupled with the suspicion of appearances, and above all of language, makes his work as compelling today as it has been for any era. The stakes are a lot higher than literary innovation, rhetorical genius, or adherence to "historical truth." Tacitus makes us live history as we read it.

We now have a different perspective on the relationship between style and content in historiography, wherein style, or narrative, becomes history; that is, as Tacitus presents it, history consists of the unfolding of a fiction. Historical narrative, the representation of this fiction, could be described as the "truth" of the facts, which by themselves are markers of so many ideological practices. Tacitean narrative *is* history in its instantiation of the imaginary relations of imperial society to its environment. Moreover, Tacitus writes as an insider, not one who has a global awareness of the subject matter. His text is therefore split between representing the past (ideological) perspective of a former era, and representing his own. In Althusser's terms, he speaks as an ideological subject representing ideological subjects. This project is hard enough to describe; with the Tiberian narrative of the *Annals*, often called the most "Tacitean" of all his prose, Tacitus shows us how much harder it is to put into operation. In order to avoid a totalizing narrative of events, the historian must try as far as possible to write from the perspective of the historical characters, who, as they acted, would have had no knowledge of the outcome. But the more such an effect is achieved, the more obscure and enigmatic the narrative. Tacitus has written this fundamental problem of historiography, to which he refuses us a narrative solution, into the character of Tiberius.

I have concentrated on the *Histories* for my analysis because in it the slips, gaps, and blind spots of ideology emerge more obviously than in the *Annals*. This has nothing to do with a progressive refinement of style;⁵⁷ each highlights a different facet of the perceptions and representations that sustained the "reality" they describe. The *Annals* may be more subtle, but that is a function of its subject matter and not of the fruition of Tacitus's talent. The year 69 brings crisis to a functioning system: the public, deprived of Nero and therefore the last artifact of Julio-Claudian ideology, suddenly confronts the gap that is the part of ideology that resists representation. The family that made and held together the imperial narrative is now gone; the resulting void is filled by the specter of what was missing, or repressed, in order for the narrative to come to be in the first place. In the *Histories*, Tacitus figures the specter as the absent Nero. Wherever it is(n't), the symptoms of trauma emerge: panic, dangerous and irrational behavior, repetitive and empty talk. Although the Julio-Claudian narrative no longer exists, the first three emperors fail, paradoxically, because they are interlopers, whereas Vespasian succeeds with a paradigm that is at once the same as and different from the Julio-Claudians: he taps the first, Augustan successes of that regime, but on the strength of a different ideology with which the foundering Roman public has managed to right itself.

The instability of this year means that the gap between “official,” public communication and its actual intentions widens considerably.⁵⁸ To reckon the *Annals* as more subtle is a fallacy of literary analysis separated from historical content. The Julio-Claudian period had going for it the seamlessness with which Augustus put together things and ideas about things; similarly, Tacitus’s narrative of that time.⁵⁹ Tiberius is Tacitus’s embodiment of his own creative process: ironic, enigmatic, self-conscious; he is simultaneously the architect of his own fictions, and implicated in them. The observation that the historian and the emperor have something in common is not new (Syme 1970, 130 n.3; 1958, 428–9), but less attention is paid to the implication that such an observation has for the stylistic daring of the *Histories*. In both cases, style imitates history in such a way as to elicit its truth, defined as something that could not be known by the actors in the midst of events themselves. Tacitus inhabits the actors’ discourse both in the form of the speeches he gives them and in the ironic narrative in between: irony allows his own narrative logic to coincide with that of the era he describes in such a way as to highlight its gaps and inconsistencies without completely distancing the historian himself from it.⁶⁰

The pretenders of 69 confront the Roman people with different faces of its own fiction: Galba, that it could no longer bear any vestige of republicanism; Otho, that it had not and could not let go of Nero; and Vitellius, that even the fiction had itself become a fiction, a simulacrum. The advent of Vespasian necessitated considerable ideological readjustment, which the new emperor facilitated by reappropriating Augustan methods of legitimating power.⁶¹ A more abrupt narrative tone and pace suit the representation of these problems, which do not erupt with such violence in the *Annals*. Thus when Wellesley rewrites the *Histories*, claiming that “expansion or contraction is called for” in order to make good narrative sense of the text for readers who are not Tacitus’s immediate contemporaries, he does not just rearrange narrative elements.⁶² He erases the network of imaginary relations represented by Tacitus within a particular narrative network, and substitutes a different fiction that he believes will make sense to contemporary readers. The internal logic of Tacitus’s history is lost.

I do not mean to detract from the usefulness of Wellesley’s text. Many times I was grateful for its clarity when I was lost in troop movements or battle formations. But I also observed (once I grasped the difficulties I was having) that with these very difficulties Tacitus tells one *why* something is happening, not just *that* it does. In the *Histories*, the rough edges are not the fault of the author’s assumptions about his readership, nor a mimetic matching of form to content; they are integral to the truth that Tacitus tells.

2 Nero

The Specter of Civil War

Beginnings in Tacitean historiography have come under a great deal of scrutiny. Syme thought that the historian had reconsidered the beginning of the *Annals* as he progressed with the writing of it and realized how much of his material led back to the Augustan regime.¹ That Tacitus states his intent to write about that time (*Ann.* 3.24), and often refers even farther back to Rome pre-Julius Caesar, gives some evidence in Syme's favor.² It is possible, however, that the complicated beginnings of both historical texts have more to do with the historian's larger scheme to depict the discursive difficulties of the principate.³ Syme appears less puzzled by the beginning of the *Histories*, as he judges it to fall into two distinct prefaces (1–3 and 4–11), the first of which he calls "concise, vivid and intense," while the second is "in the form of a digression, with the beginning and the end sharply defined."⁴ The death of Nero need cause no narrative problem, as the historian can—indeed, should—sidestep the tangled web of civil war that led up to Nero's death and begin with the new year 69, which, because of the onset of unrest in Germany, Syme locates as a "vital and inevitable" starting point.⁵ The inevitable, however, depends upon your point of view. Action on the Rhine certainly comprises an important element in the *Histories*, but that does not necessarily make it the prime mover of the narrative.

Nero's influence is written all over this story, from the public reaction to his death to impersonations of him both by subsequent emperors and by faraway fortune seekers. As Tacitus narrates it, the death of the last Julio-Claudian opens the floodgate for all the problems of empire that the shadow of Augustus previously kept in check. The repressions that constitute empire—summed up by Tacitus in one phrase, *arcanum imperii* (1.4.1)—are dangerously illuminated. Yet whatever the situation before Nero's death, people cannot bear the truth that might surface after it. From the outset,

Nero's absence represents the gap between the unbearable "real" that is beyond language, symbolization, narrative, and therefore ideology, and the symbolically structured "reality" in which Roman society actually operates. The specter of Nero stands in for that absence that the text cannot represent as "history," because the historian has no symbolic access to it. This means that Tacitus signals right away the difficulty of ideological critique: on the one hand, he is not a naive consumer of ideology—how could he be, with knowledge of the events of 69?—on the other, he asserts the impossibility of criticizing ideology from a place outside it:

Initium mihi operis Servius Galba iterum Titus Vinius consules erunt. nam post conditam urbem octingentos et viginti prioris aevi annos multi auctores rettulerunt, dum res populi Romani memorabantur, pari eloquentia ac libertate: postquam bellatum apud Actium atque omnem potentiam ad unum conferri pacis interfuit, magna illa ingenia cessere; simul veritas pluribus modis infracta, primum inscitia rei publicae ut alienae, mox libidine adsentandi aut rursus odio adversus dominantes: ita neutris cura posteritatis inter infensos vel obnoxios. sed ambitionem scriptoris facile averseris, obtrectatio et livor pronis auribus accipiuntur; quippe adulationi foedum crimen servitutis, malignitati falsa species libertatis inest. mihi Galba Otho Vitellius nec beneficio nec iniuria cogniti. dignitatem nostram a Vespasiano inchoatam, a Tito auctam, a Domitiano longius provectam non abnuerim: sed incorruptam fidem professis neque amore quisquam et sine odio dicendus est. quod si vita suppeditet, principatum divi Nervae et imperium Traiani, uberiores securioremque materiam, senectuti seposui, rara temporum felicitate, ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet. (1.1–4)

The beginning of my work will be the consuls Servius Galba and Titus Vinius, the former for the second time. For many authors narrated the eight hundred and twenty years of the previous age after the founding of the city with equal eloquence and liberty, so long as they commemorated republican affairs. After the war had been fought at Actium and the interests of peace demanded that all power be conferred upon one man, those great talents ceased; at the same time, truth was broken up in many ways, first out of ignorance about the Republic as if it belonged to another,⁶ next out of a desire to flatter, or out of hatred of, the rulers. In this way neither party, between those who were hostile and those who were slavish, cared about posterity. But you easily brush off toadying in a writer; disparagement and malice are received with ready ears, because the repulsive crime of slavishness is intrinsic to adulation, and to spite the false appearance of liberty. Galba, Otho and Vitellius were not known to me either for favors or injuries. I would not deny that my

career was launched by Vespasian, increased by Titus, and extended still further by Domitian. But for those professing uncorrupted fidelity, a person should neither be discussed with partiality, and should be discussed without hatred. But if my life is long enough, I have set aside for old age the principate of the divine Nerva and the *imperium* of Trajan, a richer and safer subject, because of the rare happiness of the times, when it is allowed to think what you want and say what you think.

The preface examines political permutations of truth and their impact on two concepts central to historiography: eloquence and freedom. In the past, whose temporal parameters Tacitus specifies only as “after the founding of the city,” people wrote with an equal amount of both. The truth of their work, we infer from what follows, was absolute, since after Actium it was broken. A state of “whole truth” exists only in a kind of mythic past, and the great writers of it (*magna illa ingenia*) suddenly vanish with the onset of the new regime. Truth is broken, we discover, because of general alienation (*inscitia rei publicae ut alienae*), and because of writers’ inclination either to fawn upon or hate the rulers. Fawning immediately shows its lack of *libertas*, but hatred bears a *falsa species* of it. Finally, Tacitus describes his own era as one that allows you to “think what you want and say what you think.”⁷

Eloquentia ac libertas at the beginning of the chapter and the phrase at the end—*sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet*—constitute an opposition between ideological and ironic notions of truth. The *libertas* of the “great writers” is political; free because they believe themselves to be free, they are at the same time members of a unified political system, their commitment to which constitutes a “whole truth.” Now, Tacitus says, that truth has been broken, and the commitment, along with *libertas*, no longer exists. In its place comes a different kind of freedom: you can think what you want because you are no longer part of a whole, you are a part among parts. You have the gracious permission of a ruler comfortable enough with his position either to exercise this freedom or not. *Licet* indicates this circumstance that Tacitus describes as a possibility, not a necessity.⁸

But Tacitus does not imply that political alienation puts him or anybody else completely outside the system. He has served the system; he writes in Latin; he is not a barbarian. Although he demonstrates the difference between the committed writing of the Republic and his own, he positions himself so as to gain the maximum credibility without professing truth. Aware that his opinions may seem the product of *odium*, he

both stresses that *odium* looks like *libertas*, even if it is only a *falsa species*, and shows that *libertas* no longer exists. The Empire still dreams of wholeness in the shape of *libertas*, which in historiography takes the form of *malignitas*, or *odium*. Belief in *libertas*, which is demonstrated negatively by “you” when “you” reject *ambitio*, and positively by the credibility of malice, represents the acceptance of the myth of Republic as the reality of Empire. The *Histories* explores the other forms of this dream, one of which is the specter of Nero.

Tacitus implies that the notion that it is possible to distinguish ideology from nonideology is itself an ideological gesture, because it involves the intervention of a fiction made-up precisely in order to sustain belief in its own order. In the preface, the two pairs of unacceptable foundations for writing history are “*ambitio/adulatio*” and “*obtretractio-livor/malignitas*,” but the syntax does not make a parallel between the two. “You,” to paraphrase Tacitus, “easily brush off *ambitio*”; by contrast, “*obtretractio et livor* are believed.” Here are two oppositions: between the two motivations for writing, and between the voices of the verbs that form their predicates. “You” actively brush off toadying; in other words, you detect that *ambitio* and *adulatio* are made-up. They exemplify the process of *fingere*. In addition, *adulatio* is described as criminal. If Tacitus had stopped there, he would have given us a measure for truth: if these two activities are fictive and transgressive, they must have as their opposite the real and the law. By contrast, unlike the easily recognizable *ambitio*, *obtretractio* and *livor* are passively believed, and *malignitas* is not a crime, like *adulatio*, but has a “false appearance of liberty.” This triad therefore represents both belief and what engenders belief, or *credere* plus *fingere*. The *fingere/credere* dichotomy characterized by *obtretractio/livor* and *malignitas* in turn casts doubt upon what looked like the certainty represented by “your” recognition of the fiction of *ambitio* and *adulatio*.

Adulatio is therefore a *foedum crimen* in the sphere of ideology, not truth. It is criminalized in order to conceal that its twin, *malignitas*, is also a fiction, a *falsa species*. The “truth” of ideology is policed in order to conceal the quotation marks. Thus *credere*—the belief that *malignitas* engenders—exists in order that *fingere* can appear obvious, and that instead of belief it itself can appear to be truth. However, in his elaboration of the motives for writing history, Tacitus shows both how they ultimately collapse into one another and how they are made to appear separate in the “reality” sustained by the impersonal or “objective” *inest*: “the repulsive crime of slavishness is intrinsic to adulation, and to spite the false appearance of liberty.”

Inest asserts the law that anchors the ideology of *veritas*—that is, *libertas*—but Tacitus does not claim any positive knowledge of *veritas* himself; he only negatively asserts what “those who profess uncorrupted fidelity” must not do: *sed incorruptam fidem professis neque amore quisquam et sine odio dicendus est*. Although it would have been possible to create a parallel between *amore* and *odio* by negating both with *neque*, the syntax instead makes two constructions of what could have been one, so that to translate literally we should say “for those professing uncorruptible fidelity, a person should neither be discussed with partiality, and should be discussed without hatred.” Tacitus flips the negative construction from “should neither . . . with” to “should be . . . without” to emphasize that he does not claim *veritas* to be self-evident.

The word *veritas* is conspicuously absent from the rest of the extant text, appearing only once more at 1.32, where Tacitus describes the mob’s disturbance at the imminent revolt of Otho:

Universa iam plebs Palatium implebat, mixtis servitiis et dissono clamore caedem Othonis et coniuratorum exitium poscentium, ut si in circo aut theatro ludicrum aliquod postularent: neque illis iudicium aut veritas, quippe eodem die diversa pari certamine postulaturis, sed tradito more quemcumque principem adulandi licentia adclamationum et studiis inanibus.

All the *plebs* was filling the Palatine, along with slaves, and with the dissonant clamor of those demanding the death of Otho and the conspirators, as if they were asking for some kind of game in the circus or theater. They exhibited no judgment or truth, since on the same day they demanded different things with equal determination, but by the accepted custom of praising any princeps with the license of acclamation and with empty zeal.

The crowd clamors for Otho’s head, but not out of *iudicium* or *veritas*. This second and final appearance of the word echoes the first in its application to the people—whom we meet here in full force for the first time—who are here shown not to possess exactly what Tacitus has told us in the first chapter is a myth in the first place. Without it, the *volgus* is a metaphor for the chaos in the symbolic order of reality: they have no means of distinguishing one thing from another (*iudicium*), as evidenced by their indifference to which emperor they cheer, and they have no *veritas* because imperial ideology is foundering. They rush to the theater and circus as places of spectacle and representation, as sites of the disappearing symbolic order.⁹

Tacitus's handling of truth is tricky, but essential to the establishment of his own position as a historian. In this first chapter, he lets the reader know that what is at stake is first and foremost the negotiation of imperial ideology, and that he will write neither as if he were outside it, for that is impossible, nor be a slave to it. He anticipates and forestalls his readers' assumption that he is one of the malicious, though his irony may often mislead them. When, at the end of the chapter, he finally speaks of himself, it is as an imperial subject living in times that he appreciates as good. Here Tacitus speaks again to an active interlocutor, but not quite the same one as "you" who turn away *ambitio*. He positions the latter "you" as the channel for the propagation of ideology, one who in averting the lie of flattery sustains that of hatred. But in good times like the present, "you" are free from the *amor* and *odium* that constrained earlier imperial writers, free also from the moral and political strictures of republican *libertas*. The imperial subject can, in principle, think what he likes in a way that the republican could not, because the *res publica* is now in fact no longer his concern.

Tacitus here acknowledges that the advent of the principate meant a kind of liberation from the intellectual constraint of republican political life; but at the same time he recognizes the new barrier of state censorship. Under a "good" emperor, such as Nerva or Trajan, as opposed to Domitian or Nero, it is permitted (*licet*), again in principle, to say what you think, but the very fact of permissibility enforces a different kind of constraint. It is the antagonism between *licet* and *velis*—what you want versus what is allowed—that constitutes the order of the principate, as the antagonism between *libertas* and responsibility for the *res publica* constituted the Republic.¹⁰ By invoking the want/allowed split at the beginning of his text, Tacitus acknowledges the privilege of free writing and thinking, at the same time designating them as the conditions in which power can operate. Furthermore, he does not posit a "third condition" from which to view the other two in a neutral, extraideological way. He therefore signals his position, not as a critic of the system from without, who has positive knowledge (*veritas*) to bring to his analysis, but as a critic of what it represses in order to exist.

Under these circumstances, Tacitus's opinions on the historians who wrote with *amor* or *odium* resemble Claude Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the perceptions of two different groups about the layout of their village.¹¹ Asked to draw a rough ground plan of it, one group figured a more or less circular arrangement of houses around the central temple; the other, two distinctly separate rows of houses divided by an invisible frontier. Lévi-

Strauss argues that this experiment demonstrates not a kind of cultural relativism, according to which each group views the arrangement differently because of its group type, but the existence of a constant over which the groups divide. This constant is not an “objective,” “actual” ground plan, but, as Žižek puts it, “a fundamental antagonism the inhabitants of the village were not able to symbolize, to account for. . . . The two perceptions of the ground-plan are simply two mutually exclusive endeavours to cope with this traumatic antagonism, to heal its wound via the imposition of a balanced symbolic structure.”¹² The division between *amor* and *odium* can be seen as just such a split over the traumatic antagonism of freedom and repression represented by the advent of the principate. This antagonism would be the *veritas* desired of historiography that it cannot represent, symbolize, or account for, and within the distortions that result can be glimpsed its repression, as well as the *fiction* of *veritas*—*libertas*—that stands in for the traumatic phenomenon itself.

Myths die hard, and what is left is the *horror vacui*. In the *Histories*, the spectral Nero fills the void as the uncanny (repressed) reminder of truth that cannot be directly represented. The disturbances he creates in the narrative are a vehicle for ideological critique, a negative demonstration of the truth about the principate. He informs the reception of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, all of whom Tacitus makes to Nero’s measure. He lingers in the guise of several characters left over from his reign who play small but important narrative roles, and manifestations of him—the “false Neros”—appear in various parts of the Empire after his death. And, perhaps most significantly, he provides the latent source of narrative movement in the form of *licentia*. *Licentia* appears with descending frequency from book 1 to book 5 as the influence of Nero grows weaker with the approach of Vespasian and the new regime. It signifies unruliness or lack of discipline throughout all the social orders: the *plebs* often rushes about without any clear motivation, as does the military; the upper class, including the emperors, is self-indulgent and greedy. Tacitus often characterizes the internal state that engenders this behavior as *libido*, which in the *Histories* comes out as an ungoverned desire for immediate personal satisfaction, whether in the *plebs* demanding the head of Ofonius Tigellinus, the ambition of Otho, the gluttony of Vitellius, or the headstrong passion of the young Domitian. After the death of Nero, a certain constraint is removed, but people are haunted, according to Tacitus, by memories and feelings about him. The new freedom is aimless and without significance until Vespasian gives it new parameters. The barrier that has been lifted does not reveal “what really is” versus “what everyone had to pretend it was under Nero”;

rather, Tacitus shows that the social framework is dependent upon the barrier. Without it, differences that produce social and political meaning are erased, and collapse into sameness and anarchy.

GALBA VERSUS NERO

Histories 1.4 begins what Syme calls the second preface, as Tacitus has completed his introduction and brief survey and is ready to give a more detailed account of the status of Roman affairs at the beginning of 69:

finis Neronis ut laetus primo gaudentium impetu fuerat, ita varios motus animorum non modo in urbe apud patres aut populum aut urbanum militem, sed omnes legiones ducesque conciverat, evulgato imperii arcano, posse principem alibi quam Romae fieri. sed patres laeti, usurpata statim libertate licentius ut erga principem novum et absentem; primores equitum proximi gaudio patrum; pars populi integra et magnis domibus adnexa, clientes libertique damnatorum et exulum in spem erecti: plebs sordida et circo ac theatris sueta, simul deterrimi servorum, aut qui adesis bonis per dedecus Neronis alebantur, maesti et rumorum avidi.

Just as the death of Nero was joyful by the initial impulse of those who delighted in it, it had also stirred up various emotions not only in the city, among the senators, people, and urban militia, but all the legions and their commanders, since the secret of empire was out: a princeps could be made elsewhere than at Rome. But the senators were happy and immediately took liberties freely as toward a princeps who was both new and absent; the first rank of the knights was closest to the senators in their response; the sound part of the populace that was affiliated with the great families, as well as clients and freedmen of those who had been condemned or were exiles, had high hopes. The lowest segment of the *plebs*, accustomed to the circus and theaters, as well as the very worst of the slaves, or those who, having squandered their own wealth, were sustained by the shameful behavior of Nero, were sorrowful and eager for rumors.

Deferring mention of Nero at the beginning of the *Histories* and putting the death of Nero at the beginning of this section, Tacitus suppresses Nero himself as a positive presence altogether but gives his absence an important place as the header of the second preface. He describes the emotional instability of the populace as evidenced by their varying reactions to Nero's death. The only ones who mourn Nero in any way comprise the very lowest segment of the population: the filthy mob that likes the circus and the theater. Such premises would recall the sites of what ancient ac-

counts reckon as Nero's greatest degradation.¹³ What brings the *plebs* and the nobility together in their reaction to Nero's death is the eagerness with which both embrace the exchange of speech. The senators leap at a new-found *libertas*, but only, Tacitus says, because Galba is new to his job and, more importantly, absent from Rome. This *libertas* has quotation marks around it; it represents the senators' way of understanding their behavior focalized ironically through the perception of *libertas* that Tacitus has given us in 1.1. Paired with *licentius* immediately afterward, it indicates that freedom is an empty category, even when the tyrant is dead. And it is the death of the tyrant that unlocks this (non-) *libertas*, Galba's absence providing only a secondary cause. The absence of Nero, then, unlocks *two* secrets of empire: that the emperor can be made elsewhere than at Rome, and that *libertas* is a fiction. The *plebs*, for its part, hunts down rumors, presumably for the latest news, but also, plausibly, those rumors that Nero was still alive. In this atmosphere, then, two different exchanges of speech occur among the opposite ends of the social spectrum, both dependent on Nero's absence. Nero's ghost haunts its survivors in their desire to talk.¹⁴

Galba's first and only public act, the adoption of Piso Licinianus, provides the opportunity for Tacitus to describe the kind of speech that begins to circulate after Nero's death. The narrative of this event covers 1.12–20, as Galba presents Piso successively to his advisors, the praetorians, and the Senate. We discover in 1.12 that the public has been discussing the possibility of adoption avidly (*licentia ac libidine*) for some months, but not because anybody possesses sound judgment or real concern for the welfare of the state (*paucis iudicium aut rei publicae amor*). Instead, people wish to talk about the adoption in order to flatter different candidates and win over friends and patrons (*multi stulta spe, prout quis amicus vel cliens, hunc vel illum ambitiosis rumoribus destinabant*) or else to voice their hatred (*odium*) of the influential Titus Vinius.

The first event of the *Histories* therefore shadows the analysis of imperial affairs that appears at 1.1. Nobody cares about the *res publica*; they appropriate it as a plaything of conversation, because the fact of the adoption makes it abundantly clear that the *res* is now *privata*. As in 1.1, the people involved in the conversation speak either with *ambitio* or *odium*; the difference is that now the stakes are no longer *veritas* or *libertas*. People talk primarily for the idle curiosity of talking, because of the "license and desire for talking about those kinds of things" (*licentia ac libidine talia loquendi*), and only after that (*dein*) because the advanced age of Galba makes the event of an adoption politically probable. The talk feeds on itself; it grows "monthly more frequent" (*crebrior . . . per illos menses*) and involves the

whole populace (*tota civitas*), as did the reaction to Nero's death at 1.4. But the members of society focus their interest in the adoption inward among themselves, out of hope for gain from those more influential, or else out of spite against the powerful Titus Vinius. Again, the adoption itself is a secondary matter: this is not surprising, if enthusiasm over government no longer exists, but what it also shows—unlike 1.1—is that there is no longer any interest in the idea of truth as it applies to government. If *libertas* for the earlier Empire was a stabilizing fiction signifying the possibility of knowing truth, it has lapsed, with the death of Nero, into the formlessness and hence meaninglessness signaled by *licentia* and *libido*. The freedom to talk only reproduces the desire to talk, in a kind of infinite loop.

The same sort of self-referential exchange occurs also among the senators when Galba presents Piso as his heir (1.19): *Et patrum favor aderat: multi voluntate, effusius qui noluerant, medii ac plurimi obvio obsequio, privatas spes agitantes sine publica cura* ("There was a favorable reaction among the senators: many were willing, those who were not spoke even more warmly, and the majority in the middle acted with outright obsequiousness, thinking about their own prospects and not the public interest"). Tacitus ironically underplays the genuine goodwill with the antonymical contrast between *multi voluntate* and *effusius qui noluerant*, emphasizing instead the role-playing and obsequiousness that have become the hallmark of conversation. Like the *multi* who talk about the forthcoming adoption in 1.12, the senators care about their *privatae spes*, not the *publica cura*. This focus on private aspirations does generate an outward focus, but not the kind that encourages individuals to view themselves as part of a political body that affects and is affected by outside circumstances. Instead, the senators demonstrate a nearly total lack of interest in the adoption in their desire to keep up appearances, looking to the emperor only to reflect back to him whatever they find. The upper echelon of power is structured like a circle, hermetically sealed off from the actuality of events and focused only inward at itself or at the figure of the emperor in the center, circumscribed by the mirror-talk of the senators, powerless to break out. Expressing this position of paralysis, Tacitus says of the emperor-to-be: "In the following four days, the time that intervened between his adoption and murder, no public utterance or move was made by Piso" (*nec aliud sequenti quadriduo, quod medium inter adoptionem et caedem fuit, dictum a Pisone in publico factumve*, 1.19.1–2).

The focus now shifts away from the self-abasement of the senators to news of the German revolt, but the narrative still frames the event in terms of its manifestation in discourse and the paralyzing effects it has as

an object of speech. The *sermo* about Piso's adoption had become *crebrior . . . per illos menses*; now the reports (*nuntii*) of the German legions' defection become *crebrioribus in dies*. The fact that the news is bad only makes the *civitas* more eager to hear it. In the midst of this atmosphere of rumor and unrest, the senate decides to send a delegation to the German armies, debating in secret whether or not to send Piso as the representative of the princeps's prestige. Cornelius Laco, the praetorian prefect, is also supposed to go but instantly vetoes the suggestion. The choice of other ambassadors is left up to Galba, but the situation becomes ridiculous as he allows the nominees to excuse themselves or suggest substitutes. Everybody scrambles either to be included in or excluded from the mission according to their hopes or fears; the emperor cannot act decisively; and the narrative finally cuts away from the event before we learn of its issue, suggesting that amid the chaos effected by discussion the action never comes to pass. Its metamorphosis into an item of speech, an emphasis that Tacitus chooses to give the event, disrupts and usurps the actual occurrence of this potentially important political event, implying that Nero's legacy to his country is an almost obsessive inaction. This inaction, engendered by the use of language to playact and hedge bets, in turn gives rise to the crumbling of the power hierarchy and the state's disintegration into disorder. Finally, we hear in 1.20 that four tribunes are discharged during this time, all friends or associates of Otho.¹⁵ The rest receive no punishment, but the removal of these four *per artem et formidine* ("by means of cunning and intimidation") only leads to the fear that all are suspect. Tacitus gives no indication whether or not this fear has any foundation in fact, and in so doing brings to a climax the sense of panic and confusion that has been building throughout this section. The fact that no one possesses the means to interpret correctly the removal of the tribunes underlines the role of deceptive appearances that are engendered by speech run amok, and the prevalent mood is one of fear, deception, and suspicion.¹⁶

This section of the narrative presents a crescendo of chaotic scenarios from the political, judicial, and military arenas that trace an interconnection between speech and emotional excess. All important public aspects of Roman life, the narrative implies, have been affected by the free fall of language. People no longer have their own opinions, speak their minds, or translate talk into effective action: at the same time, the emotional temperature has reached fever pitch. In these circumstances, Galba tries to establish his rule, but from the very beginning he is thwarted by the remainders of Nero's regime that he encounters on his journey and at his arrival in the city. In 1.5, for example, Tacitus describes turbulence and unrest in the city

garrison. Nymphidius Sabinus, whom Nero named praetorian prefect in 65, had induced the praetorian guard to defect from Nero when the revolt of Vindex and Galba was under way and Nero had yielded to a somewhat premature despair. He chose a hasty departure from Rome for Alexandria, trusting in the prefect of Egypt's loyalty.¹⁷ Sabinus used Nero's flight to persuade the guard, formerly a bastion of loyalty to the princeps, to declare for Galba.¹⁸ In this chapter, Sabinus provides a link back to Nero as one of his appointees, but Tacitus mentions Sabinus only in passing. The main focus of the chapter is the city soldiers' basic allegiance to Nero and disaffection for Galba:

Miles urbanus longo Caesarum sacramento imbutus et ad destituendum Neronem arte magis et impulsu quam suo ingenio tractus, postquam neque dari donativom sub nomine Galbae promissum neque magnis meritis ac praemiis eundem in pace quem in bello locum praeventamque gratiam intellegit apud principem a legionibus factum, pronus ad novas res scelere insuper Nymphidii Sabini praefecti imperium sibi molientis agitur. Et Nymphidius quidem in ipso conatu oppressus, set quamvis capite defectionis ablato manebat plerisque militum conscientia. (1.5.1–2)

The city garrison, affected by a longtime allegiance to the Caesars, had been induced to desert Nero more by cunning and suggestion than from its own inclination. It now realized that payment of the bounty promised in the name of Galba was not being given, that there was not be the same place for great services and rewards in peace as in war, and that it was too late for them to ingratiate themselves with an emperor made by the legions. Eager for insurrection, the garrison was agitated additionally by the crime of their prefect Nymphidius Sabinus, who was striving after imperium for himself. To be sure, Nymphidius was overpowered in the act itself, but though the head of the desertion had been removed, many of the troops retained a guilty conscience.

Tacitus here accomplishes several important things. First, he demonstrates the power that Nero still exerts over this important segment of the military by alluding to the Neronian story of Sabinus's treachery. Again, he gives us no positive information about that incident but emphasizes instead what it left behind. Nero is indirectly present both in the form of Sabinus, who had been his appointee, and more significantly in the uneasy conscience of the praetorian guard. The state of emotional upheaval in the city garrison then extends to the irritation of the army at large at Galba's stinginess and adherence to old-time principles of discipline, qualities that do nothing to endear him to those whom Nero has accustomed to "like the

vices of emperors no less than they had once feared their virtues.”¹⁹ Although he tries to constitute himself as the anti-Nero—that is, as a positive vision of a different regime—Galba, like Otho and Vitellius after him, exists as a projection of public feeling about the absent Nero.

Focusing upon the military, 1.5 picks up the theme of the previous chapter, which describes more broadly the general public opinion of Galba and reinforces the impression that the ghost of Nero informs a whole network of attitudes toward the new regime. Together 1.4–5 present the absent Nero as a kind of energy source against which Galba’s character and policies will be measured, without Tacitus’s drawing any kind of direct comparison between the two emperors. While 1.4 treats the reactions of three classes of society—aristocracy, equites, and *plebs*—1.5 deals exclusively with the praetorian guard, and, by extension, the whole military element.²⁰ The attention to the state of the army presages the crucial role that it will play in the events of 69, while it also shows the erosion of the power hierarchy and the descent into disorganization that mark most of the army’s activities in the *Histories* and wreak havoc on the rest of the population. In addition, 1.5 foreshadows the defection of the praetorian guard from Galba to Otho. With the absence of Nero as its impetus, a progression develops from unease at the circumstances of Nero’s death, and an allegiance that never completely broke down, to a new defection instigated by Otho. Since Otho mirrors and replays many Neronian scenarios, the defection of the praetorians to Otho signals a return, a progression looping back on itself, to fidelity to Nero; in other words, the narrative here suggests either that no change has transpired in the break between regimes or, more subtly, that the break that should have transpired has failed to do so. As Tacitus says of Galba’s regime:

*eademque novae aulae mala, aequae gravia, non aequae excusata.
ipsa aetas Galbae inrisui ac fastidio erat adsuetis iuventae Neronis
et imperatores forma ac decore corporis, ut est mos vulgi, compara-
ntibus.* (1.7.3)

There were the same evils in the new court, equally serious, but not equally excused. Galba’s age itself was a source of derision and discontent among those who were used to the young Nero and compared the two emperors, as the crowd will, with regard to their looks and physical beauty.

Galba paradoxically fails in his attempt to correct the evils of Nero’s court *because he is not Nero*. Otho, by contrast, will allow his Neronian features to be recognized, but only passively. He does not promote himself as “Nero” in the same way that the false Nero does, because he recognizes

the strength he derives from allowing himself to be molded by public desire. As evidenced by the rhetorical decline of his speeches in book 1, he weakens as he nears his goal, which when realized leads almost immediately to his death. The paradox of Otho's power consists of the inverse relation between his public rhetorical force and personal elusiveness. His influence is strongest when he need only inflame the enthusiasm of those who can get him what he wants. As emperor, he must display his own character in decision and action, and so destroy the aura of insubstantiality that is his greatest aid.

The description of Galba's march to Rome (1.6) illustrates his inability to effect this break. "Slow and bloodstained" (*tardum Galbae iter et cruentum*), the journey involves the execution of two men associated with Nero: Cingonius Varro, a consul-designate, and Petronius Turpilianus, ex-consul.²¹ Galba condemns these men *inauditi atque indefensi tamquam innocentes* ("unheard and undefended, like [or] as if they were innocent men"). *Tamquam* does not clearly indicate whether the two are innocent or not, and suggests that the guilt of the pair depends upon whether their association with Nero is taken as a crime. Galba, as the head of the new regime, can decide how he would like to play this: either he can accept all Neronian supporters who have committed no other crimes and create an amnesty or he can rid himself of them and the potential threat they pose to the new order. But *tamquam* illustrates Galba's lack of consistency. The grounds for killing Cingonius were that he was an ally of Nymphidius and therefore an *enemy* to Nero, whereas Turpilianus was Nero's appointee. Galba does not define the stakes of his new position or indicate what it will be in relation to what went before. His killing of Cingonius suggests that he wants to uphold the Julio-Claudian system and attack its enemies, and this is borne out by his desire for ratification from the (Neronian) Senate, the major aim of his march to Rome. But the execution of Turpilianus suggests the desire to break with the old principate.

THE ADOPTION OF PISO

The adoption of Piso is the major event that transpires during Galba's very short principate. Upon hearing about the defection of the legions in Upper Germany (1.12), Galba decides to hasten his plans for adoption. Clearly this is a gesture to consolidate his power and outline his own principate more definitively. But the nomination of candidates comes not from himself but from advisors whom Tacitus describes as highly suspect: Titus

Vinius, Galba's co-consul; Cornelius Laco, the praetorian prefect; and a freedman, Icelus, who has been given equestrian status and has assumed the name Marcianus. The three disagree on the choice of candidate: Tacitus says that Vinius favors Otho, with Laco and Icelus opposed to him but not agreed on an alternate. In the end, though Galba's choice of Piso might be interpreted as his own, Tacitus strongly suggests that Laco influenced the decision: *pauca praefatus de sua senectute, Pisonem Licinianum accersiri iubet, seu propria electione sive, ut quidam credidere, Lacone instante* ("Having said a few things about his own advanced age, he ordered Piso Licinianus to be summoned, whether by his own choice or, as several people thought, at Laco's urging," 1.14.1).

Laco had become friends with Piso at the house of Rubellius Plautus, one of Nero's victims (*Ann.* 14.57–59), but pretended they were strangers, a fiction that Tacitus says was the more plausible given the different characters of the two. Laco is an idler with no head for affairs and no interest in measures that he himself has not proposed (1.6.1; 1.26.2), while Piso is nobly born, with a general demeanor that suggests *mores antiqui*, a characteristic that he shares with his adoptive father. But this characteristic, like Galba's, is far from universally popular. Galba misrecognizes the ideological character of a phrase such as *mores antiqui*, which is as much a construct of the Julio-Claudian system as Nero is. In approving Piso he approves a chimera; a specter of the old system that he thinks he can beat, or escape.

The narrative of Piso's adoption, which opens with the infighting of Galba's three advisors, is interrupted at the point where it mentions Vinius's connection to Otho. Vinius's support of Otho as a candidate for the succession summons the shadow of the absent Nero both obliquely and overtly. First, there is the suggestion that Vinius favors Otho because he hopes for an alliance between his own unmarried daughter and the single Otho. But Tacitus believes that Galba, having only just seized the principate from Nero, did not want to hand it over to Otho. Next, the narrative glances away from the adoption issue to a chapter-long discussion of Otho's relationship with Nero (1.13). Tacitus tells us that Otho endeared himself to Nero by emulating his debauchery, and that Nero had married off his mistress Poppaea Sabina to Otho until he could rid himself of his own wife, Octavia. Later, he suspected Otho of actually being in love with Poppaea and sent him to administrate the province of Lusitania. Otho apparently accomplished this task with grace but sided with Galba in the latter's revolt. Throughout the campaign against Nero he behaved in an exemplary fashion, having conceived the hope of adoption right from the

beginning. He also had the support of several of the troops and quickly won over Nero's courtiers because he so closely resembled him.

After this excursus on Otho's career under Nero, the narrative of Piso's adoption resumes. Galba calls together his chief administrators, summons Piso, and makes his adoption speech. But the ghost of Nero hovers in the guise of Otho, whom Tacitus compares with Nero both in the middle and at the end of this chapter:

Credo et rei publicae curam subisse, frustra a Nerone translatae, si apud Othonem relinqueretur. namque Otho pueritiam incuriose, adulescentiam petulanter egerat, gratus Neroni aemulatione luxus . . . faventibus plerisque militum, prona in eum aula Neronis ut similem. (1.13.4)

I believe also that anxiety had crept up [on Galba] about the Republic, which would have been taken in vain from Nero if it were given up to Otho. For Otho had behaved carelessly as a boy and impudently as a youth, a favorite of Nero's because he imitated his debauchery. . . . The majority of the military favored him, and Nero's court was disposed toward him, as he was similar to Nero.

Galba understands that if a break is to be made with Nero, adopting Otho is the wrong course of action, not because of his character per se—he has proven his administrative capacities and his loyalty to the new emperor—so much as his resemblance to the former emperor. But Galba has not shown himself to be particularly adept at enforcing different rules, and the problems presented by the absent Nero always manage to return. Ascribing a rational motive to Galba is therefore an article of faith; hence Tacitus's striking assertion of personal belief (*credo*), the single first-person use of the verb that appears nowhere else in the Tacitean corpus except among the interlocutors of the *Dialogus*.

This use of *credo* is doubly ironic; first, because Tacitus has already detailed the volatility of people's feelings about the dead Nero, and therefore the inadvisability of attempting to wrench the system around too quickly. *Credo* in this sense would signify the opposite of what is meant—something like “no kidding, Galba was anxious”—because, as we hear immediately afterward, everyone likes Otho and will therefore probably make trouble if someone else is adopted instead. Second, *credo* marks Tacitus's revelation of the frame of his own narrative, or rather, the place where frame and representation meet and merge. Belief sustains the people in the narrative, and when it founders, so do they. Galba is the living reminder that it is foundering. When Tacitus expresses his own belief, then, he iron-

ically asserts the solidarity of *his* representation with *their* system of representation. This attachment of belief to Galba's actions returns in his obituary (1.49), where we hear that "in the shared opinion of everyone, [he would have been] capable of ruling, if only he had never ruled" (*omnium consensu capax imperii, nisi imperasset*). Here, the belief has spread to a wide audience, who can only sustain it in the form of a self-contradictory paradox; that is, belief is always the medium through which whatever does not make sense is made to make sense.

Attempting to assert the character of the new administration as old-fashioned discipline and morality, then, Galba chooses Piso over Otho. But in addition to his own *credo*, Tacitus underlines the futility of the gesture by making known Laco's influence on Galba's choice, and by mentioning Nero's killing of Rubellius Plautus, the link between Laco and Piso. The first demonstrates Galba's helplessness; the second previews Piso's death at the hands of Otho *qua* Nero replacement. Nero killed Plautus; Otho will kill Piso. Galba is caught in a zero-sum game, where the winner always turns out to be some figure of the dead emperor. Even in death Galba cannot escape Nero, as 1.49 recounts the ironic detail that Galba's severed head ends up on the tomb of Patrobius, one of Nero's freedmen whom Galba had sentenced. *Sic transit imperium*.

Galba's adoption speech (1.15–16) is a striking piece of rhetoric, highly republican in tone and seemingly very frank about the circumstances of the principate. In it he emphasizes that he and Piso are in the difficult position of deciding the future of a state that is used to the rule of one man as well as to the absolutism of his power, embodied in the principle of hereditary succession. The principle that he introduces with the adoption of Piso is the choice of a successor from outside his own family, someone he considers to be the best man for the job. In this way, he says, the tradition of the body politic as the emperor's possession, to be bequeathed to a member of his family, will be broken, while the choice of candidate from that body politic will *substitute for* freedom: *sub Tiberio et Gaio et Claudio unius familiae quasi hereditas fuimus: loco libertatis erit quod eligi coepimus; et finita Iuliorum Claudiorumque domo optimum quemque adoptio inveniet* ("Under Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius, we were like the heirloom of one family: in the place of liberty there will be the fact that we have begun to be elected, and now that the dynasty of the Julio-Claudians has ended, adoption will seek out all the best men"). Mark Morford takes the phrase *loco libertatis* to refer to "Republican *libertas*,"²² but although Galba has begun this new line of argument with a reference to the Republic—*si immensum imperii corpus stare ac librari sine rectore posset, dignus eram a*

quo res publica inciperet ("If the huge body of the Empire could stand and be balanced without a guide, I would be the one from whom the Republic might begin")—he goes on to draw a direct contrast neither between empire (as embodied in the Julio-Claudians) and his own new hope for government nor between the former and the Republic. Instead, what he contrasts with empire is a convolution of his new plan with a negatively defined concept of *libertas*; in other words, his mode of adoption will provide something that is "in the place of *libertas*."²³ The Republic, in his own words, is a mirage, the object of a contrary-to-fact condition. It is not something that he refers to as a known quantity, but something that would begin (*inciperet*) if the condition were to materialize (which it will not). He thus refers to the "real" Republic as entirely absent, inhabiting a space somewhere between the trace of itself that has been effaced by the *immensum corpus* and the new "Republic" that would have to begin under his own aegis.²⁴

The phrasing of *loco libertatis* and its juxtaposition with the previous era of empire therefore conjures the "real Republic," but in its absence and with closer reference to the imperial concept of *libertas* that dominated the Julio-Claudian rule: that is, if anyone living under the Julio-Claudians were to think that when these emperors were all dead, Republican *libertas* would exist, they would be living with a fiction that Galba emphasizes will not come true. Saying that he will put something in the place of *libertas* is therefore tantamount to saying he will substitute one thing for another that is not really there, or is there as an interchangeable symbol. What he is substituting now is a different political fiction: literally and roughly translated "that which we have begun to be chosen as." The "we" of both *fuimus* and *coepimus*, as well as the passive *eligi*, includes himself, Piso, and all Romans as imperial subjects, constituted within the same symbolic order. The difference between this one and the previous is that now "we" have the possibility of reinventing ourselves with each new emperor, whereas before "we" were passed along as a unit. "Inheritance" implies something that stays the same from generation to generation and is given meaning by the family to whom it belongs.

Galba here echoes Tacitus's ambiguous phrase in *Annals* 1.1: *Tiberii Gaique et Claudii ac Neronis res florentibus ipsis ob metum falsae* ("The *res* of Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, and Nero were false because of fear while they themselves were alive"). *Res* may be taken to mean "affairs" but is overdetermined by its political connection with *res publica*, so that in this context the genitives of the emperors' names seem to have replaced the adjectival *publica*. The *res* now belongs to an individual. Galba therefore

spells out clearly what Tacitus leaves as a kind of pun or Freudian slip; in both cases, the idea that what was fragmentary because it belonged to everyone individually became singular and symbolically whole, in keeping with Augustus's wish to be seen as the unifier of the country. Morford argues that for several imperial writers, including Tacitus, the concept of *libertas* was closely related to that of *securitas*.²⁵ Further, a good princeps is "essential to *libertas* [so that] the work of the *res publica* could be continued in concord and peace." *Libertas* is thus an important factor in the choice and adoption of the imperial successor; it reinforces the structure of power by binding to itself the state: *principatus ac libertas*, as Tacitus puts it at *Agricola* 3.1. In choosing a successor from the public instead of his own family, Galba makes public an operation that upheld a public relationship but was actually conducted privately: *si te privatus lege curiata apud pontifices, ut moris est, adoptarem . . .* ("If as a private citizen I were adopting you by curiate law in front of the pontiffs, as is customary . . .").

The imperial fiction of *libertas* as a state of wholeness is ironic, given the myth of wholeness that Tacitus at *Histories* 1.1 gives us to understand was the normative concept of the Republic during the Julio-Claudian era. But this myth operates precisely to conceal the fact that the state of affairs under the Empire is itself the wholeness that was absent when the country was a Republic. By positing the Republic as whole, the Empire disguises its own regulative ideals and norms and makes of the myth of Republic something to which it strives to return *when it is already there*. To put it differently, the myth sets up the problem to which it offers itself as a solution.

In this part of Galba's speech, then, Tacitus reintroduces and shifts the concept of *libertas* as it appears in 1.1 to signal a change effected by the end of the Julio-Claudian era: *libertas* is no longer a likely political fiction, and Galba is quite honest about what he intends to put in its place. The problem is that, as Tacitus has already told us, his actions do not live up to his words. Although he appears to recognize that the Republic is no longer a viable form of government, and does not want to revert to the stagnant ideology of the Julio-Claudians, his own precepts are informed by the former and haunted by the latter. His approbation of Piso's breeding and character sums up his attitude in toto: Piso is from an old republican family (a descendant of both Pompey and Crassus), like himself, and has "the expression and bearing of old-fashioned *mores*" as well as being "right-thinking and severe." Galba's goal of creating a new order is obstructed by his adherence to this model of inheritance and likeness.

At 1.15.4, Galba elaborates to Piso the reasons why the latter is a worthy successor: he is mature, has borne adversity, and has the qualities of

fides, *libertas*, and *amicitia*. The compliment of *libertas* strikes a discordant note, since Galba himself admits that even under his new system, with which he articulates a break from the old dynasty, *libertas* does not exist—only something that is *loco libertatis*. Similarly, at the very end of the speech, he tells Piso that he is about to rule people who can “tolerate neither total slavery nor total liberty” (*imperaturus es hominibus, qui nec totam servitutem pati possunt nec totam libertatem*). In Piso’s case, the use of the term seems surprising, since the persecution of his family by Nero has meant for him a life of exile, and therefore little opportunity to display the various shades, always political, with which Tacitus often colors *libertas*.²⁶ What does he want us to understand by Galba’s choice of expression? In the case of *tota libertas* as opposed to *tota servitus*, the former provides one side of a pair of political extremes, but whether it refers unambiguously to the former Republic is less clear.²⁷ The speech centers on the three uses of this term, each of which convolutes the impression of the others. Piso appears first in the speech; he has *libertas*, but it is an undefined and seemingly generic marker for a good and worthy citizen. Next, Galba addresses the political problem of the previous regime, and *libertas* receives a negative definition that connects it to its reception as an imperial entity. Finally, he refers to it as an absolute that takes its meaning from the articulation of its opposite. Taken together, the three illustrate the reason for Galba’s failure: though he intuitively feels the political climate, which depends upon the notion of *libertas* as the lack of *vetus res publica*, he does not fully understand that changing it is not a matter of calling attention to it in order to announce something new. Otho fares much better when in the course of his coup he summons the support of the praetorians—which they had denied to Piso—by accusing Galba of a misuse of language: *nam quae alii scelera, hic remedia vocat, dum falsis nominibus severitatem pro saevitia, parsimoniam pro avaritia, supplicia et contumelias vestras disciplinam appellat* (“For what others call crimes, he calls ‘remedies,’ while with false names he calls savagery ‘severity,’ avarice ‘frugality,’ executions and insults to you ‘discipline,’ ” 1.37.4).

Otho succeeds because he understands that in these times, words are tricky. As a reference to Thucydides’ account of the revolution in Corcyra (3.82.4), where “words changed their meanings,” this speech characterizes Otho as one who knows how to play that system.²⁸ This speech forms an ironic parallel with Galba’s, as they both amount to a bid to consolidate power. But Otho positions himself as a free-floater: he does not deploy political rhetoric that will connect him with a specific system in any way. Instead, he concentrates on the failings of Galba’s short stint in power, stress-

ing particularly the slaughter at the Milvian Bridge that was elided by Piso's description of Galba's takeover as *incruens* (1.29.2). Significantly, he does not invoke Nero except obliquely and in passing, reminding his addressees of the misuse of money by Galba's freedman Icelus, who he says wasted more money than Polyclitus, Vatinius, and Egnatius. These were three of Nero's most influential freedmen, and they are as close as Otho comes to mentioning Nero directly.

By contrast, both Galba and Piso aimed directly at discrediting their predecessor in an attempt to establish themselves against him. But the public's reactions to reminders of him demonstrate the ambivalence that he has left behind: in 1.72, for example, Otho decides to order the death of Ofonius Tigellinus, Nero's thoroughly unpopular ex-praetorian prefect. The crowd demands the execution but because Tigellinus reminds it of the former emperor, is divided in its reaction between "hatred and desire for Nero" (*quibus odium Neronis inerat quibus desiderium*); that is, that Nero has willed a legacy of unrest about himself with which a clean break cannot be made. Galba cannot succeed in this climate, as Tacitus clearly tells us, because no change actually occurs in the administration of government, and Galba compares unfavorably with Nero's looks, charm, and easy discipline. But there is more. Not only does the crowd not accept Galba because it prefers the easier image of life that Nero in some respects provided, Nero also represents what makes it possible to go on believing in a positive form of political reality, or gives positive shape to the abyss of anarchy that confronts the populace now that he and his dynasty are over. Nero as specter provides the link in the symbolic chain between Julio-Claudian and Flavian rule, which throughout the *Histories* comes close to breaking.

NERO AND OTHO

All of the pretenders in the *Histories* must deal with the emotional effects with which the *volgus*, both civil and military, reacts to the new focus or perspective on the Julio-Claudian fiction. Success requires an unspoken connection with the populace that redefines parameters as the same but different. Galba makes the mistake of trying to expose and then openly reshape the symbolic economy of power but fails to understand his own implication in it; he thinks he can make real the fiction of republican discipline, without realizing that the previous purpose of that fiction had been to appear real. The public cannot accept such a traumatic display of its own willing belief.

Otho is perhaps the savviest character during this time of civil unrest, and the prime goads to his motivation, paradoxically, are ones that he invents himself. Tacitus tells us that Otho has debts, desires a much more lavish lifestyle, and feels hatred and jealousy of Galba and Piso, but in order to stimulate his lusts he “invents” (*fingebat*) several fears about his own position and the possibility of his own assassination:

fingebat et metum, quo magis concupisceret: praegravem se Neroni fuisse, nec Lusitaniam rursus et alterius exilii honorem exspectandum. suspectum semper invisumque dominantibus qui proximus destinaretur. nocuisse id sibi apud senem principem, magis nociturum apud iuvenem ingenio truce[m] et longo exilio efferatum: occidi Othonem posse. (1.21.1)

He was inventing fears too so that he might desire the more: that he had been tiresome to Nero and couldn't expect another Lusitania and the office of another exile. The one who was appointed as next-in-command was always suspect and subject to the jealousy of those in power. This had harmed him in the eyes of the old princeps and would do so even more in those of a young man grim by nature and turned nasty by his long exile. Otho could be assassinated.

These are in one sense excuses with which he can justify his criminal action, but more importantly they show the mobility of his imagination, which under these unsettled circumstances has considerable advantages. Whereas Galba tries to stick to a party line, and Vitellius is caught up in the spectacle of events, Otho exploits chaos by avoiding the appearance of a break with the Neronian era while invoking only the shadow of Nero with his resemblance to him. In these reflections, Otho begins with the problems he might have encountered with Nero, then switches to the reception he might receive from Galba and Piso as a result. In between, he remarks ambiguously to himself that heirs apparent are always in a dangerous position. But to whom does he consider himself heir apparent, and therefore in danger? Does he refer back to the previous observation about Nero, in which case the suspicion and jealousy would come from Nero because of Otho's popularity and resemblance to him, or to his near miss at being adopted by Galba? Then again, why should the loss of Nero's favor influence Galba badly? Surely the opposite would be true.

In these private ruminations, Otho constitutes himself first as the product of what Nero thinks of him. He therefore presents himself to himself as the fiction of a fiction he has created: the Nero of Otho's imagination imagines Otho. Tacitus crafts our early impression of him differently than that of a Nero look-alike or wanna-be, because the insubstantiality of

Otho's connection with Nero is all-important. The false Nero tries to look like Nero, to invent himself as a positive presence, but Otho has to evoke Nero without having anything to do with Nero, even in his own mind. Tacitus presents Otho here as a kind of metonym for the effect of ideological breakdown in 69, during which the specter or imaginary presence of Nero gives shape to the identity of the body politic. Such an identity is necessarily schizophrenic, because the fictions that structure it in a functioning symbolic economy battle the specter that looms when the latter breaks down: "the spectre gives body to that which escapes (the symbolically structured) reality."²⁹

These deliberations also position Otho between the two regimes in such a way as to identify him with neither. It is also unclear whether Tacitus reports Otho's thoughts at this moment, or opinions that Otho expressed to others.³⁰ On the level of the narrative, this ambiguity furthers complicates Otho's political identity, since we know neither what his allegiance is nor the addressee for whom this indirect report is intended. We then hear that he knows these circumstances of transition present an opportunity not to be missed (*opportunos magnis conatibus transitus rerum*), but at the same time discover in the next two chapters that Otho's connection to Nero is important. Although he stands to gain much by the lack of fixity in his status or scruples—as he says to his praetorians at 1.37, he does not know what to call himself as he stands before them (*Quis ad vos processerim, commilitones, dicere non possum*)—it is clear that the *absence* of Nero works in his favor. We have already seen that at the adoption of Piso, Otho was a favored candidate because of his high standing in Nero's court, and participation in the activities (*libidines*) that particularly characterized it. When Tacitus begins the narrative of his bid for power, he first remarks that Otho's character was not as soft as his body, but then describes Otho's susceptibility to the enticements held before him of Nero's old way of life (1.22). The rest of the chapter attributes Otho's decision to the predictions of soothsayers who had been part of Poppaea's retinue, particularly one Ptolomaeus, who had accompanied him to his post in Spain and told him he would outlive Nero.

Again, this analysis links Otho's bid with an unsavory and untrustworthy element of Nero's court, which seems to contradict the earlier evaluation of his character as more resolute than his outward appearance—that is, the part of him most reminiscent of Nero and Nero's way of life—might suggest. But this apparently antithetical pair of traits can be reconciled if we understand Nero here as a memory or a received idea, and not as an embodiment of a real collection of actions and attributes that Otho wants to possess. The following chapter (1.23) slants the resemblance between Otho

and Nero differently, as it shows him using his service, not his resemblance, to Nero as a way of winning the trust and familiarity of the troops on his return from Spain: *Sed sceleris cogitatio incertum an repens: studia militum iam pridem spe successionis aut paratu facinoris adfectaverat, in itinere, in agmine, in stationibus vetustissimum quemque militum nomine vocans ac memoria Neroniani comitatus contubernales appellando* ("But whether this criminal machination was spur of the moment [i.e., the result of the soothsayer's prediction] or not is uncertain: for a long time he had aspired to the support of the military because of his hope of succession, or preparation for crime; on the march, in the rank and file, at the stopping places, calling all the oldest soldiers by name, by calling them 'comrades' by mentioning their service with Nero"). As in his speech to the praetorians, Otho here uses the turbulence of language to his own ends, calling himself a *contubernalis* only in the most metaphorical of senses. Otho had had little to do with these soldiers, and they certainly owe him no military allegiance. Instead he plays upon their *desiderium* of the easy tasks they performed under Nero—accompanying him to Campania or Greece—and by evoking these memories establishes one of himself, which he fosters with money and sympathetic conversation. Thus the Otho that the soldiers know now is a figment of their pleasant reminiscences of Nero and their displeasure at the difficulties imposed upon them by Galba. Otho is not directly connected with the previous emperor, but neither does he agitate actively against the new one. The farthest he goes is to "sow complaints and ambiguous conversation about Galba and other disturbances of the crowd" (*inserendo saepius querelas et ambiguos de Galba sermones quaeque alia turbamenta volgi*, 1.23.1).

Otho's success lies in his ability to manipulate these disturbances in language, which we have seen constitute the prime characteristic of the *volgus* in the *Histories*. Piso, by contrast, mirrors Galba in his determination to fix meanings to concepts without understanding the implications of the terms he uses, and therefore only highlights and exacerbates chaos.³¹ At the beginning of his speech to the praetorians (1.29–30), Piso refers to himself as a Caesar and to Galba as his father in order to remind them of the imperial system and their duty to it. But he also refers to "Caesar" as a "name":

sextus dies agitur, commilitones, ex quo ignarus futuri, et sive optandum hoc nomen sive timendum erat, Caesar adscitus sum; quo domus nostrae aut rei publicae fato, in vestra manu positum est, non quia meo nomine tristorem casum paveam, ut qui adversas res expertus cum maxime discam ne secundas quidem minus discriminis habere: patris et senatus et ipsius imperii vicem doleo. (1.29.2)

This is the sixth day, my fellow soldiers, since I was recognized Caesar, though I am ignorant of the future and whether this name should be desired or feared. With what fate for my house and the state I have been recognized, it is in your hands; not that I fear a worse end in my own name, because I know about adversity just as I am learning that not even favorable circumstances hold less peril. I grieve for my father, the Senate, and the Empire itself.

Piso needs to establish a ground for his appeal to the praetorians' conscience, for that is all he can hope for. As he indicates at the end of the speech, they can expect the same amount of money whether they kill Galba and himself or not; money now acting as a leveler for the worth of the principate, Piso must resituate its symbolic status: *nec est plus, quod pro caede principis quam quod innocentibus datur, proinde a nobis donativom ob fidem quam ab aliis pro facinore accipietis* ("The reward given the assassins for the murder of the emperor will not be greater than that which will be bestowed on those who refrain from crime; nay, you will receive no less a gift from us for loyalty than you will from others for treason" 1.30.3). If "Caesar" is only a name; moreover, if *res publica*, *senatus*, and *populus* are only *vacua nomina*, as he asserts at 1.30.2, what he asks from them is to make one name—Caesar—"full," and to believe in it. Instead of calling Caesar *hoc nomen*, he could have said *id* ("whether *this* should be desired or feared"), thereby retaining its symbolic status; but he unwittingly participates in its degradation by revealing it as a sign, an interchangeable unit that has meaning only with relation to other signs, and no symbolic status of its own. "Caesar" has now become a metonym instead of a metaphor, as we can see in the rest of Piso's terminology: from asking for the soldiers' allegiance to "Caesar" he warns them not to let the worst element choose an *imperator* and ends by referring to Galba as the princeps their better instincts should not allow them to kill.

In seeking to ground the relationship between the military and the head of government, which he reinforces by calling the soldiers *commilitones*, Piso only steps into another arena of ambiguity. When he refers to his position as a *nomen*, he compromises the hope of reestablishing stability in the political structure; with the pun inherent in the idiom *meo nomine* he compromises his own identity. The joke cannot be rendered in English, which is why I have translated unidiomatically: if we leave Wellesley's "on my own account," the point is lost. If Piso does not heed the danger "in his own name," then in his own terms he does not heed it as "the name Caesar," that is, as an empty form. Although he himself accepts the process of making and believing in Caesar—he immediately refers to Galba as his fa-

ther, as if the Julio-Claudian system were still operative—he nowhere offers a coherent account of why or how this system still represents the truth of empire. He admits that the old republican institutions may be “empty names” but warns against letting bad men make an *imperator*. *Imperator* therefore has an ambiguous status: it is associated with Otho (Piso’s damning description of him precedes), it is what follows Republic, and it can be good or bad according to the whim of the soldiers. “Caesar” and princeps, by contrast, are what Piso would have the men believe are good and right.

Piso states that the agreement of “the whole human race” made Galba Caesar, while “with the consent of all you soldiers” Galba made him so (1.30.2); their entry into the city was “bloodless,” and power transferred to them “without discord” (1.29.2). The description of the takeover we know from the earlier narrative to be untrue, but Piso is not deliberately lying nor trying to pull the wool over the praetorians’ eyes. He simply intuits what he cannot say: that “Caesar” and princeps are no more legal than any other name, and it is only their “brand” that has any currency. The significance of the assumption of these titles by a usurper, and the passing-on of them to a successor, is at best artificial, and Piso is doing his best. But he himself enjoys only the briefest of stints as heir apparent, and by 3.58 we discover that both the emperor and the army are fake:

ipse aeger animi studiis militum et clamoribus populi arma poscentis refovebatur, dum volgus ignavum et nihil ultra verba ausurum falsa specie exercitum et legiones appellat [. . .] nec deerat ipse voltu voce lacrimis misericordiam elicere, largus promissis, et, quae natura trepidantium est, immodicus. quin et Caesarem se dici voluit, aspernatus antea, sed tunc superstitione nominis, et quia in metu consilia prudentium et volgi rumor iuxta audiuntur.

[Vitellius] himself, depressed, took some comfort in the enthusiasm of the soldiers and the shouts of the people demanding arms, calling with false appearance a crowd lazy and ready to offer nothing but threats an “army” and “legions” [. . .] Nor was he short of expression, voice, and tears to elicit pity; long on promises, and extravagant, as is the nature of the fearful. Indeed he was willing to be called Caesar, having spurned it before, but then went ahead because of his superstition about the name, and because out of fear he both listened to the advice of the wise and the rumor of the crowd at the same time.

Piso’s own lack of artifice may be glimpsed at the end of the speech, where he states that killing and preserving are financially worth the same amount. He means to appeal to the soldiers’ *fides fama*que as the charac-

teristics that distinguish them, reminding them of their own identity by recalling that Nero deserted them, not they Nero (1.30.2). In fact he seals his own fate when he juxtaposes money with the death of the princeps, because, as we discover at 1.47.2, he is worth more dead than alive: *Pisonem Verania uxor ac frater Scribonianus, Titum Vinium Crispina filia composuere, quaesitis redemptisque capitibus, quae venalia interfectores servauerant* ("Verania, Piso's wife, and his brother Scribonianus, and Crispina, Titus Vinius's daughter, buried their bodies. They first sought and bought back the heads, which their murderers had kept to sell").

The frankness of Piso's statement about the "empty names" of "Republic," "Senate", and "people" is misguided because he has nothing strong enough to offer in their place. Many years later, Pliny would acclaim Trajan by saying that he had been chosen not because of civil war, but because of peace and the process of adoption; and that it would be right to say that there was no difference between an emperor chosen by gods and one chosen by men (*Talem esse oportuit quem non bella civilia nec armis oppressa res publica, sed pax et adoptio et tandem exorata terris numina dedissent. An fas erat nihil differre inter imperatorem quem homines et quem di fecissent? Pan. 5.2*). While Piso can only talk a good game, by the time of Trajan's adoption Pliny can invoke the support of the gods for the adoption process. If we take Pliny seriously, this position is strong enough to bear the mention of civil war and the comparisons with the first adoption of a nonfamily member under circumstances much more politically tricky. In 100, then, Pliny can recall the year 69 as a negative example of the adoption process without impinging upon the present situation.

Over the course of the extant part of the *Histories*, the epistemology of the principate progressively takes the form of speech (Galba, Piso, and Otho), sight (Vitellius), and touch (Vespasian), so that the latter heralds a new era of the real-as-tangible. But Vespasian's touch is also magic—he heals a man who is blind and one crippled in his hand (4.81)—so that the divide represented in the structure of belief and make-believe is cemented over, and belief becomes indistinguishable from truth.³² And Vespasian himself is not immune: after Mucianus's exhortation to seize power, in the face of favorable omens Tacitus describes the former as "not untouched by this kind of superstition" (*nec erat intactus tali superstitione*, 2.78.1). In other words, the connection with the divine is not merely a matter of propaganda devised by the new regime in order to forge a new and tighter bond between itself and its subjects, although the Flavians obviously did understand the importance of fostering it in the creation of their self-image.

Konrad Heiden stresses that the directionality of propaganda is not “the art of instilling an opinion in the masses. Actually it is the art of receiving an opinion from the masses.”³³ Similarly, Hannah Arendt could be describing the reality represented by Vespasian’s magic touch when she discusses the habit of totalitarian dictators of “announcing their political intentions in the form of prophecy” and gives as an example Hitler’s prediction that if the “Jewish financiers . . . succeed once more in hurling the peoples into a world war, the result will be . . . the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”³⁴ The prediction then becomes the “retrospective alibi” when the annihilation in fact occurs. Arendt continues: “In other words, the method of infallible prediction, more than any other propaganda device, betrays its ultimate goal of world conquest, since only in a world completely under his control could the totalitarian ruler possibly realize all his lies and make true all his prophecies” (350).³⁵ Interestingly, neither Hitler nor Stalin achieved this goal: Stalin disagreed with Trotsky’s vision of a pan-national revolution, and the Nazis were more interested in what Arendt describes as a crazy projection of their fictional state into the far distant future, concentrating not on world domination as an immediate project, but the annihilation of groups they saw as obstacles to the creation of the master race.³⁶ The Romans were far more successful in realizing a world empire. Though structurally similar in many ways to these totalitarian regimes, Roman imperialism differed greatly in its ultimate vision and aims: Erich Gruen states the case nondogmatically when he claims that Augustus maintained different foreign policies depending upon need and circumstance, but always in the service of bolstering efficiency in the subdivisions of his government as well as the image he wished to project of himself as its head.³⁷

Piso does not realize that the attempt to speak openly about Otho’s revolt only dooms him further, as we can see in the reaction to his speech: *Dilapsis speculatoribus cetera cohors non aspernata contionantem, ut turbidis rebus evenit, forte magis et nullo adhuc consilio rapit signa <quam>, quod postea creditum est, insidiis et simulatione* (“After the spies had slipped off, the rest of the cohort did not spurn him as he harangued them, as happens during turbulent times, and seized the standard more by chance, still without clear motivation, than by treachery and dissimulation, as was believed afterward,” 1.31.1).³⁸ His audience displays neither anger nor loyalty; rather, it seems that his words have barely registered at all. Tacitus once again describes the mood of a crowd as temperamental but lost, although Piso has been as blunt as possible with them, including providing a vibrant depiction of Otho’s vices and the harm they will cause. But the at-

tempt to “tell it like it is” increases the inaction and trouble, while Tacitus’s formulation of the sentence avoids saying definitively whether these men were loyal or not. By contrast, after Otho’s speech six chapters later (1.37–38), the addressees stampede to the arsenal for weapons and make ready for battle. Even here, the response is not uniform. No consideration is given to rank or order, and the men seize whatever arms come to hand. This creates a highly comic picture: legionaries, praetorians, and auxiliaries each take arms proper to a body different than their own, and no attempt is made by the tribunes or centurions to stop them. Nevertheless, they do manage to act, if not efficiently, at least effectively, and herein lies the difference between the confidence that Otho, as opposed to Piso, can inspire. Chaos is the order of the day, but the attempt to wrench it around only makes it worse. Piso and Galba both see the solution to the problem as a matter of asserting what is the case, or is to be shortly, as soon as things settle down. But they do not perceive that their repression of Nero, in the form of vilifying both his character and that of Otho, his surrogate, only exacerbates the trauma experienced by the populace at his memory and absence. This absence reminds the populace of its paradoxically terrifying present status: freedom (*licentia*, the evil twin of *libertas*).

Nero-as-specter therefore (dis)embodies not the source of anxiety but its representative. The source of anxiety is the political free fall that is equivalent to the nakedness of Hans Christian Andersen’s emperor: the truth of empire is negatively revealed, and indeed reinforced, by Galba’s and Piso’s metaphorical stripping of Nero. Nero’s absence in this way becomes a receptacle for the fear produced by awareness of what has been suppressed in order for empire to exist. Put differently, what was necessary to sustain empire has disappeared; its absence leaves not blank space but negative presence that offers a retreat from the abyss.³⁹

Tacitus thus constructs Otho as the figure of Nero beyond naming the affiliation that existed while Nero was still alive. It is certainly true that because of this affiliation Otho is popular with the *volgus*, whether army or civilian, which has a great deal of power in the *Histories*. But it is true more because of the memory of Nero than because of any real resemblance between the two, which the narrative either dispels or renders ambiguous. Otho has a short life, and most of his character must be sketched in the first book. In contrast to Galba and Piso, of whom we receive a fairly definitive portrait in a very short time, in keeping with their definitive ideals about how to change the course of civil war, Otho remains an enigma.

Despite Syme’s assertion that the facts are enough, the “fact” remains that we cannot obtain them, least of all from Tacitus. To describe Otho’s

behavior during the palace riot (1.82.1), Tacitus picks up the expression *contra decus imperii* ("contrary to imperial propriety") from 1.71.1, in which Otho's actions are evaluated (by an unspecified source) as *ad decorem imperii composita* ("set for the propriety of rule"). The two contradictory evaluations of behavior make it difficult to pin him down as one type or the other.⁴⁰ The substance of his character lies somewhere between nebulous narrative voices, while the attempt to name him results either in a fiction derived from one element of the text or another, but not a composite picture, or in a picture that, faithful to the text, preserves contradiction but not irony or ambiguity. Syme's very different account of this incident demonstrates that pace Momigliano, he is not Tacitus at all, and brevity of expression does not make him so. Otho is vital to Tacitus as a placeholder for Nero, the name that the *volgus* gives to what they lack. This name guarantees the identity of the *volgus*, not despite the fact that Nero is dead and the country is plunged into civil war, but because of it. The name is what reconstitutes him and them; but Tacitus shows us that this dream of wholeness is predicated on unfulfilled satisfaction. Not only can Otho not be Nero; even Nero could not be Nero. Galba's and Piso's biggest mistake therefore lies in their appeal to a positive reality (old-fashioned values; discipline) to turn the tide of chaos. Tacitus depicts Otho, on the other hand, as playing upon the desire of the *volgus* by staying just out of reach. As he tells his nephew before committing suicide, the boy must neither forget nor remember too well that Otho was his uncle: *neu patrum sibi Othonem fuisse aut oblivisceretur umquam aut nimium meminisset* (2.48.2).

Otho here shows himself to understand very well the dynamic of politics. On the one hand, the admonition is a brave and generous piece of familial rhetoric spoken out of concern for the boy's safety. On the other, it doubles as a summary of the *Zeitgeist*. It is exactly the condition of the Roman people during this year that they can neither remember the past very well nor forget it. The names by which they called things until very recently have been swept away, but the new names are unknown as yet, and the admission that the old ones are gone opens the door to total anarchy. Otho is able to keep things in check by a constant and judicious process of rearranging names, a skill that he demonstrates in another speech to some troops after a nearly fatal riot (1.80–85). During this incident, some inebriated praetorians, alarmed by the movement of the Seventeenth Cohort, which is moving from Ostia to Rome and which is to receive arms from the opened armory in the praetorian barracks, decides to cause trouble. They stampede the palace and frighten off some senators, leaving Otho

to deal with the soldiers, who, not finding any particular outlet for their frenzy when they arrive, want to wreak general havoc:

undique arma et minae, modo in centuriones tribunosque, modo in senatum universum, lymphatis caeco pavore animis, et quia neminem unum destinare irae poterant, licentiam in omnis poscentibus, donec Otho contra decus imperii toro insistens precibus et lacrimis aegre cohibuit, redieruntque in castra inviti neque innocentes.
(1.82.1)

There were arms and threats everywhere, now against the centurions and tribunes, now against the whole Senate. Their spirits were crazed with blind panic; and because they could direct their anger at no one person, demanded license against everyone, until Otho, casting imperial dignity aside, stood on a couch and barely contained them with entreaties and tears, and they returned unwillingly and guiltily to the camp.

This passage clearly indicates the significance of the term *licentia* for the relationship between princeps and *volgus*. Otho behaves in a fashion that appears highly undignified for a person in his position, except for the fact that in his position, it is exactly the right behavior. Again, the evaluation of his actions as *contra decus imperii* invites the question of whose opinion this is, and what in fact would be *decus imperii*. By this point in the text, it seems that this is the ironic opinion of Tacitus; a moment of truth, articulated negatively. *Imperium* is a concept with which this particular year nearly dispenses, and this incident captures the problem in miniature.

At the end of the second preface (1.11), Tacitus concludes by saying: *Hic fuit rerum Romanarum status, cum Servius Galba iterum Titus Vinius consules inchoavere annum sibi ultimum, rei publicae prope supremum* ("This was the status of Roman affairs when Servius Galba for the second time and Titus Vinius as consuls began a year that was their last, and nearly the end of the Republic"). He introduces the riot narrative in the following way: *Parvo interim initio, unde nihil timebatur, orta seditio prope urbi excidio fuit* ("Meanwhile, from minor origins that caused no threat, a mutiny came about that was nearly the destruction of the city," 1.80.1). In 1.11, Tacitus speaks "republican." Although both the term *res publica* to denote the Roman state and the reference to consuls in order to date the year represent contemporary imperial discourse, they have special significance in the *Histories* in light of Tacitus's opening paragraph, where he signals that his narrative will examine the articulation of imperial power through the prism of a time when it was all but destroyed. Further, 1.11 looks strikingly republican when interpreted in conjunction with 1.80, in which it is the city and the

princeps as the most significant inhabitant of the city to which the historian draws attention. The fate of Galba and Vinius, consuls, is already sealed at the end of the second preface. But the riot is not fatal to the city, and Otho finds his way out of danger, at least for the time being. *Imperium* in the *Histories*, then, is significantly inflected by Otho's handling of it. When he behaves *contra decus imperii*, and yet manages to control the most important source of power besides himself, the question is, What has the definition of *decus imperii* been hiding?

Imperium therefore becomes a negative or void outlined by the emotional fever of the *volgus* and the princeps's way of dealing with it. *Decus* suggests otherwise; it sustains a normative fiction of *imperium* that the interaction of Otho and the rioting soldiers disrupts. Action, and the maintaining of *imperium*, is the product of Otho's unseemly behavior, which turns the tide of the riot and the soldiers' contradictory and negatively expressed feelings: resistance (*inviti*) and guilt (*neque innocentes*). The next day, the whole city is as if captured. Houses are closed up, the streets empty, the *plebs* downcast. Alienated from itself, it waits for resolution between the two critical parties. Such an outbreak sketches the lack of identity that the death of Nero and the civil war threatens. The soldiers, for their part, feel personal emotion (*tristitia*) rather than a return to the proper standard of behavior (*paenitentia*). The latter would imply that there is a standard to return to, but Tacitus shows us with this episode that there is not. Their identity, too, is in question. Bribery helps, and each man is given 5,000 sesterces. The tribunes and centurions throw down their insignia and ask for their lives and discharges. The soldiers understand the insult, return to duty, and demand punishment for the instigators of the riot.

Otho has a lot on his hands at this point. But Tacitus again sends the reader in different directions to understand where the situation stands. Having just commented that the soldiers are now "composed for duty" (*compositus in obsequium*), he switches to free indirect discourse to describe what Otho is thinking:

Otho, quamquam turbidis rebus et diversis militum animis, cum optimus quisque remedium praesentis licentiae posceret, volgus et plures seditionibus et ambitioso imperio laeti per turbas et raptus facilius ad civile bellum impellerentur, simul reputans non posse principatum scelere quaesitum subita modestia et prisca gravitate retineri, sed discrimine urbis et periculo senatus anxius, postremo ita disseruit. (1.83.1)

Although matters were in turmoil and the minds of the soldiers divided, Otho, since all the best men were demanding a remedy for

the present license, and the crowd and majority, thrilled at revolt and an *imperium* based on popularity, were driven to civil war more easily by rioting and looting, simultaneously reflected that a principate sought by crime could not be held by sudden discipline and old-fashioned severity. But worried about the straits of the city and the danger to the Senate, he finally spoke in the following manner.⁴¹

The syntax at the beginning of the passage makes it difficult to understand how much of it represents Otho's thought. However, if we understand the dependent clauses after *quamquam* and *cum* as part of the indirect statement, Otho's personal circumstance merges with the historical one: the concern of *optimus quisque* for a return to discipline is reflected in his own for the city and Senate, and the bad behavior of the *volgus* in his own crime.⁴² These are rhetorically affiliated in a chiasmus: (a) the best of the crowd demand a remedy; (b) the majority want civil war and rioting; (b) Otho reflects upon his crime; (a) Otho worries about the dangers to city and Senate.

Otho understands both his milieu and himself in his milieu; in him, Tacitus gives us the quintessence of the time. He represents both *optimi* and *volgus*, that is, order and discipline; the reverse; and the lack of harmony between the two that Tacitus consistently shows us as the defining feature of this turbulent year. What is less clear, however, is how we are to understand his vehemence in describing the Senate as the foundation of *aeternitas rerum et pax gentium et mea cum vestra salus* ("the eternity of our power, the peace of nations, and yours and my safety alike"), when the speech is framed by the senators' unseemly behavior in the face of the praetorian revolt and their fear and prevarication when discussing the Vitellian revolt in Otho's presence thereafter. Chilver ascribes Otho's motivation to the preservation of the "propaganda value" of the Senate and constitution; Keitel suggests that what first appears to be a "perversion" and "ludicrous" is a way for Tacitus to show the reader "just how much was at stake during A.D. 69, a year which Tacitus calls *rei publicae prope supremum* (1.11.3)", and that the passage "suggests a concomitant decline in morality which may explain why the Romans have gotten themselves embroiled in ruinous civil war and leaves the reader troubled about the future."⁴³ Chilver's "propaganda" idea is a quick gloss on the speech; he does not explore in detail what propaganda during a civil war might consist of, nor how it might work. Juxtaposing Otho's lofty ideal of the Senate with the craven flattery that follows, Tacitus rather undermines the idea that such a depiction would work as propaganda. Keitel amalgamates Otho's and Tacitus's narra-

tive voices, which would warrant exploration, but her concept of Otho's rhetoric as an important indicator of the cultural temperature is engaging. Galba, too, had evoked sensitive political themes, but Otho is more successful. Why?

Otho speaks to people who have lost the parameters that organize their social and political identity. Tacitus's description of the *volgus's* inability to cope with the death of Nero except with displays of senseless and inarticulate violence shows not it's the *volgus's* desire for anarchy but its fear of it, as at 1.50, where people worry about the current situation and the dubious characters of Otho and Vitellius. Their minds return to the civil wars of the past, and they fear that this time the *res publica* will not survive. This is a concern not just for the senators and equestrians, for whom there is *aliqua pars et cura rei publicae* ("some sort of share and interest in the state"), but also the *volgus*. Here, *cura rei publicae* means "influence in politics," a modicum of which the upper classes still (theoretically) have. The *volgus*, by contrast, has been cut adrift. The disguising of this schism is the mark of the principate: a regime that is essentially totalitarian finds a way to incorporate everyone. The mark of the Republic, on the other hand, was to acknowledge the struggle between classes. What Tacitus tells us here is that the trauma of 69 consists of the reintroduction of the schism with no political mechanism to support it. The division between princeps and Senate is manifested in Galba's acclamation outside of Rome, even though he returns there to have it ratified; the division between Senate/upper class and *volgus* is clearly stated here in 1.50.⁴⁴

In the *Histories*, however, the *volgus* is far more powerful than the Senate, which is represented as outside the loop that now exists between princeps and people. The schism in the structure of power is now neither absorbed by the fantasy of completeness that Augustus introduced nor exists as a dynamic and motivating political principle. It has swallowed itself up, imploded. In these circumstances, the *volgus* has lost its reality; or rather has been pushed into a limbo between acknowledging the fiction of its own political place and wanting it back again. This situation represents the difficulty of recognizing what Žižek calls the "fantasy-framework" of reality, without confronting the desire for that framework; hence its mood of constant unrest, guilt, and indecision.⁴⁵ Even after Otho quiets the soldiers with his speech, they do not return in an orderly fashion to duty but creep around the city acting as spies in the houses of the rich. Everyone is frightened and suspicious. This state of affairs obtains because of the inability to accept as fantasy the system that the radical break of Nero's death had re-

vealed. If we take as a comparandum Jacques Lacan's theory that sleepers awaken into a "reality" that is actually fantasy, in order to escape the traumatic kernel of something "Real" that only appears in dreams, we could say that Tacitus takes the representation of events in 69 a step farther: with the breakdown of the reality-fantasy, the *volgus* can neither escape there nor confront the traumatic core of social relations that is repressed into ideological structures. That is why Otho is so successful: unlike Galba, he sets the fantasy straight again.

However, both Otho and Galba ultimately fail because they cannot think beyond the Julio-Claudian relationship with the Senate. The element successfully repressed during that era is the military nature of the principate, the *arcanum* that makes itself known in 69. Neither of the first two pretenders knows how to take advantage of or manipulate this breach: they still look to the Senate to ratify their power, while Vitellius's tyrannical behavior is grossly obvious. Galba, the first leader to be "made" outside of Rome, ironically does not understand his situation. He acts instead as the precursor to Vespasian, who figures out how to spin a new narrative from the exposed secret, turning it inward again. Vespasian is the repetition of Galba, this time recognized and understood.

Otho's speech reflects his understanding that success lies in drawing together the separate elements of *optimi*, *volgus*, and princeps, using the rhetoric of antiquity that had served Augustus so well.⁴⁶ He calls the soldiers' motivation *pietas* and describes the importance of the Senate as that which even the Germans of Vitellius's army would not denigrate as the rioters had. Clearly, the rhetoric has nothing to do with "fact," something that Tacitus underlines by making it so hyperbolic and so inconsistent with the surrounding narrative. To call it propaganda presupposes that a truth exists outside of Otho's rhetoric that he systematically obscures in favor of his own interest in maintaining power. But Tacitus amply demonstrates through his depiction of the *volgus*, which signifies the *mentalité* of the political body at large, that the "truth" is what has been left over from the Neronian era, cut adrift by the loss of the Julio-Claudian emperor as a kind of super-signifier. In his speech, Otho tries to give it back its "truth," not cover it up. In order to do so, he restores the primacy of the *idea* of the Senate by universalizing it to a degree that is logically absurd (it commands loyalty even from tribes that are enemies of Rome) but ideologically sound. The Senate is the cornerstone of a political edifice that includes the commoner and the princeps; all are heroically united by Otho so as to embrace both the schism between classes and the fusion effected by a government subordinate to one man:

quid? vos pulcherrimam hanc urbem domibus et tectis et congestu lapidum stare creditis? muta ista et inani<m>a intercidere ac reparari promisca sunt: aeternitas rerum et pax gentium et mea cum vestra salus incolumi<ta>te senatus firmatur. hunc auspicato a parente et conditore urbis nostrae institutum et a regibus usque ad principes continuum et immortalem, sic<ut> a maioribus accepimus, sic posteris tradamus; nam ut ex vobis senatores, ita ex senatoribus principes nascuntur. (1.84.4)

What? Do you believe that this most beautiful city stands because of houses and roofs and the accumulation of stones? Those silent and lifeless objects are destroyed and repaired at will: the eternity of the state, the peace of nations, and the welfare of both myself and you are reinforced by the safety of the Senate. Just as we received from our ancestors this continuous and immortal order that was instituted with the auspices consulted by the patriarch and founder of our city, and the kings all the way down to the *principes*, so let us pass it on to our posterity; for just as from you, senators are produced, so from senators, *principes*.

Otho stresses that the city is much more than just an accumulation of physical material, because bricks and stones are *muta*. They cannot keep alive the symbolic structures that sustain the construction of a nation's identity; they must be invested with significance. Words are everything; words like *pietas, aeternitas, pax, parens et conditor*.⁴⁷ But Otho understands that he is patching up the veil that has been ripped to reveal the abyss. The truth is in the split, and Otho expresses the split with a juxtaposition of words: *ulline Italiae alumni et Romana vere iuventus ad sanguinem et caedem depoposcerit ordinem, cuius splendore et gloria sordes et obscuritatem Vitellianarum partium praestringimus?* ("Would any sons of Italy and true Roman youth have demanded blood and death for this order, by whose splendor and glory we have dazzled the dirt and darkness of the Vitellian partisans?" 1.84.3). Greatness and crime, dirty glory—these the princes must be able to reconcile.

However, in order to prevail, to really enforce discipline, Otho needs to set aside the scruple that makes him reflect upon his own criminality and execute all the troublemakers. The self-admission of his own guilt makes him both moral and clement, but it also means that he has no firm hold on *imperium*. Galba has a similar problem, but for different reasons. His executions lack credibility, as he is perceived as too old and feeble, and his decisions as inconsistent (1.6–7). Otho's own character is a trap: he understands the fundamental transgression that constitutes *imperium*, but he also knows that what supports it is the healing of that breach. The narra-

tive of his rise and fall is that of a struggle to suspend this antithetical pair, but at this point in history it is a losing proposition. Otho fails because he embodies a system that (at this moment) fails; it will take Vespasian and a new course of action to bring things back in line. It should be noted that Otho commits suicide because he refuses to allow the civil war to continue, and Tacitus gives him a brave adieu. Vespasian does not accede to power before a terrible battle against Rome, and the burning of the Capitoline itself.

3 Power and Simulacra

The Emperor Vitellius

Tacitus illustrates the failings of both Galba's and Otho's regimes through these two principes' use of speech. As I argued in the last chapter, it is the ability to conjure and manipulate verbal images that underlies the success (however short-lived) or failure of the regime. Tacitus defines the initial stages of civil war as the reinvention of social narrative, and the first two emperors as spokesmen through whom the anarchic *volgus* hears definitions of itself that it either supports or rejects. Galba and Otho therefore represent the ideological crisis in terms similar to Tacitus's own as he bends and distorts the narrative of the *Histories*. Vitellius, however, makes no speeches whose wording Tacitus divulges. Instead, the historian uses the Vitellian narrative to explore sight, not hearing, as an indicator of social perspective. The transition from Galba and Otho to Vitellius is one of removal, from a stage at which the old ideology was still current enough for the first two emperors to try to interpret it to their advantage to one that appears cut adrift, relying mostly upon the immediacy of vision without interpretation. However, in order to illustrate some generalities about the characteristics of looking with which Tacitus endows the crowd, I will start with an example from Otho's reign.

At Otho's condemnation of Ofonius Tigellinus, Nero's former praetorian prefect, the crowd rushes in a frenzy of blood lust to the palace, the fora, and to the circus and theaters (1.72). They gather in the latter two, Tacitus tells us, because there they have the opportunity to demonstrate with greater impunity (*plurima volgi licentia*), and historical evidence shows that at these venues the masses were accustomed to express themselves not only in their reactions to the entertainment provided, but also in communication with the emperor.¹ It seems natural enough that in seeking a place to demonstrate their approval of Otho's decision to put Tigellinus to

death, they should congregate at the places where they are accustomed to express themselves publicly. Yet this situation, though similar to common occurrences of mob agitation at the theater in the emperor's presence, bears some important features that distinguish it from that phenomenon. Here, the circus and theaters are assumed to be empty: there is no race or show that provides the opportunity for people and princeps to come together in the same space and interact with one another. The princeps too is absent, and the mob is not lobbying for some request or reform that the princeps, made aware by the clamor in the public space, may put into effect as a signal of his goodwill and generosity.² Instead the crowds rush to the entertainment venues, having overflowed (*effusi*) from the palace and fora, to "roar with seditious cries" (*seditiosis vocibus strepere*) over a decision that has already been taken by an emperor who has had little or no dealings with them in his short term in power.

Here again, we see the crowd behaving with *licentia*, which I identified in the last chapter with freedom from the symbolic order, a freedom that terrifies rather than liberates. The crowd is not so much reveling in the chaos, giving voice to a Dionysian pleasure, as it is expressing the fear that accompanies the unknown. "Freedom," to quote Žižek, "designates the moment when the 'principle of sufficient reason' is suspended, the moment of the *act* that breaks the 'great chain of being', of the symbolic reality in which we are embedded."³ The shouting of the crowd illustrates its own confused attempt to find the "symbolic reality" that Galba and Otho as leaders try to organize, but we see just as clearly the level of damage that the death of Nero has done. The combination of power and spectacle particularly characterized Nero's reign as he took the stage and put his audience in the embarrassing position of having to react to two roles at once, actor and emperor.⁴ As Nero's ex-praetorian prefect, Tigellinus draws the crowd back to the theater, but its feelings are contradictory: *corrupto ad omne facinus Nerone, quaedam ignaro ausus, ac postremo eiusdem desertor ac proditor: unde non alium pertinacius ad poenam flagitaverunt, diverso adfectu, quibus odium Neronis inerat et quibus desiderium* ("When he had corrupted Nero in every kind of crime, he dared to do some things behind Nero's back and finally deserted and betrayed him. For this reason the crowd demanded no one else's punishment more tenaciously, although with differing motivations: some out of hatred for Nero and others out of desire for him," 1.72.1–2).

The crowd apprehends the event as neither real (because they go to the theater to acknowledge it) nor staged (because there is nothing in the theater). The absent princeps is applauded with mere noise, unlike the often

rehearsed acclamations that were a common vehicle for the public to express its opinion, or even those that Nero supposedly coerced from his subjects. Instead, the peculiar behavior that the death of Nero generates manifests itself as a fascination with or desire for a spectacle that is not there. The idea of an absent spectacle is of course oxymoronic: the intrinsic property of spectacle is to show itself. However, the transition from Nero to civil war can be expressed precisely in terms of what various characters and groups see when they look at things.

With his own theatrical aspirations Nero had introduced both a heightened awareness of spectacle and a particular social problematic, since—to press Hans Christian Andersen's emperor into service again—revealing himself as an actor was tantamount to the emperor undressing himself in front of his people. In Suetonius's story about the young soldier who wanted to "rescue" Nero from the improprieties of dress and behavior that his role in the *Hercules Furens* demanded (*Ner.* 21.3), we perceive a dialectical relationship between politics and spectacle. Shadi Bartsch suggests that Nero's behavior both produces and illustrates the interchangeability of life and theater, as he brings to the stage the murders he has committed in life and vice versa:

Under Nero and his perversions the theater seemed to lose its character as a site for mimesis, whether of mythical plots or even the emperor's own crimes. Instead, we find a theater that spills over into the emperor's offstage life, and what transpires when Nero is on the stage supplies evidence to the stunned eyes of his public that not only does the actor-Nero imitate the emperor, but the emperor too reproduces, willy-nilly, his stage roles offstage.⁵

Bartsch implies in her argument that Nero breaks the barrier between stage and life, but in her description of the role as "spilling over" into the emperor's life she appears to agree with Foucault that transgression maintains the limit rather than destroys it—that is, if there were no limit, no spilling "over" would be possible; or, to put it in reverse, the spilling over itself constitutes the limit.⁶ However, the dilemma of Suetonius's soldier suggests a different relationship. What the soldier recognizes is the truth of the situation; namely, that the category of "emperor" is a fiction, and the fiction is therefore indistinguishable from the emperor. The distinction between actor and emperor breaks down not because the one imitates the other, but because the category of "actor" becomes the other of a fiction—that is, something that is already other. The category of "same" cannot apply. Bartsch's term "theatricality," preserving as it does the concept of a distinction between life and stage, cannot adequately describe a situation in

which life is already a stage, and has been since “Caesar” transformed itself from a name into a title.

In Tacitus’s anecdote about the false Agrippa Postumus (*Ann.* 2.40), for example, where the captured slave saucily remarks that he “was made” (*factus esset*) Postumus in the same way that Tiberius was made Caesar (*quomodo tu Caesar*), the slave’s choice of the adopted name over Tiberius’s *praenomen* reveals the symbolic aspect of the emperor’s power. Under Tiberius, Tacitus suggests, this externalization of a hidden internal principle is only momentary, whereas under Nero it becomes permanent. When he takes to the stage, he makes public what was behind the mask of power all along: the mask of power, which the young recruit correctly recognizes as the imperial person. Thus John Henderson’s analysis of the Neronian principate (“And all the while, everything we are ‘learning’ of Dynastic Necessity is going to brand itself academic farce, for the arch-comedian Nero is set to *unwrite* this—the Julio-Claudian epic-narrative”) is plausible in the sense that Nero destabilizes the fiction that previous emperors had managed to maintain, but inadequate for explaining the young soldier’s experience, which depends upon the recognition of Nero as the epitome of the whole dynasty.⁷ Nero’s mask of his own face (*Suet. Ner.* 21.3), the theatrical boat he chooses as the murder weapon for his mother (*Suet. Ner.* 34.2; *Ann.* 14.6), and Nero himself as the bride of Sporus (*Suet. Ner.* 29) are three of the most vibrant pieces of evidence that demonstrate the symbolic nature of lived reality that only temporal distance—and certain historians—can analyze and interpret.

Tacitus does so colorfully in the *Annals*, but Dio, although he provides the same sort of evidence, misses the point of it. In Dio’s treatment of the final rebellion against Nero, Julius Vindex incites his soldiers by reminding them of Nero’s acting career, decrying the emperor who had sullied the principate in such a fashion:

εἰτά τις τὸν τοιοῦτον Καίσαρα καὶ αὐτοκράτορα καὶ Αὐγουστον ὀνομά-
σει; μηδαμῶς· μηδεὶς ὑβριζέτω τὰ ἱερὰ ἐκεῖνα ὀνόματα. ταῦτα μὲν γὰρ
Αὐγουστος καὶ Κλαύδιος ἔσχον, οὗτος δὲ δὴ Θυέστης τε καὶ Οἰδίπους
Ἀλκμέων τε καὶ Ὀρέστης δικαιοτάτ’ ἂν καλοῖτο· τούτους γὰρ ὑποκρίνε-
ται, καὶ ταύτας ἀντὶ ἐκείνων τὰς ἐπωνυμίας ἀντεπιτίθεται. (63.22)

Will anyone, then, call such a person Caesar, emperor, and Augustus? Absolutely not. Let no one do violence to those sacred names. Augustus and Claudius held them, whereas this man would most rightly be called Oedipus, Alcmeon, and Orestes. For he plays these roles and has exchanged these names for the others

Vindex chooses the Julio-Claudians who were deified as his counterexamples to Nero's degeneration, thereby opposing a fiction with another fiction. His outrage is directed against someone who would defile a name, a "sacred title"; that is, against one who illustrates the replaceability of names. The problem thus erupts in Dio's work, but it does not form part of any sustained examination.

What happens when Nero is gone to a society conditioned to looking at the fiction of power? In chapter 1, I argued that Tacitus describes Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, as well as the *volgus*, as simulacra, because they represent imitations of imitations. Nero revealed the truth of the principate, but although he apparently had his critics, he was still a Julio-Claudian, which was enough to sustain the balance between *fingere* and *credere* necessary for the fiction still to work. In the aftermath of his death, however, the looking to which Nero had accustomed his people no longer corresponds to the fiction itself, but to a fiction of the fiction. As the specter of the *Histories*, Nero represents the absence of what is necessary to maintain "reality." The look turns into the blank gaze, which no longer makes a symbolic connection between the image and that of which it is the image. Tacitus associates this phenomenon particularly with Vitellius and the events that occur during his regime.

THE LOOK OF THE PRINCIPATE

Consider the following passage from a letter of the proconsul of Asia, declaring the decrees of the province on the new calendar, probably from 9 B.C.:

. . . . πότερον ἡδείων ἢ ὠφελιμώτερα ἔστιν ἢ τοῦ θειοτάτου Καίσαρος γενέθλιος ἡμέρα, ἣν τῇ τῶν πάντων ἀρχῇ ἴσην δικαίως ἂν εἶναι ὑπολάβοιμεν, καὶ εἰ μὴ τῇ φύσει, τῷ γε χρησίμῳ, εἴ γε οὐδὲν οὐχὶ διαπεῖπτον καὶ εἰς ἀτυχές, μεταβεβηκὸς σχῆμα ἀνθρώπων, ἑτέραν τε ἔδωκεν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ὄψιν, ἥδιστα ἂν δεξαμένῳι φθοράν, εἰ μὴ τὸ κοινὸν πάντων εὖ τύχημα ἐπεγεννήθη Καίσαρ.⁸

. . . . is the birthday of most godlike Caesar more sweet or beneficial, which we may consider equal to the beginning of everything, if not by nature, then at least by usefulness, inasmuch as there was no appearance that had collapsed and changed to misfortune that he did not set right. And he gave a different look to the entire order of things, which would most pleasurably have embraced destruction, unless he had been produced as the common good fortune of all people.

This statement is striking for several reasons. First, Caesar's birthday is gauged to be the proximate ("useful"), not ontological ("natural"), beginning of all things, without which the universe would nevertheless have fallen into ruin. The document recognizes that the new regime fills in for something lost—the "faces of rule that had collapsed and changed to misfortune"—but euphemistically expresses its acceptance of the new rules. To say that the whole cosmos would "most pleasurably have embraced destruction" emphasizes the populace's dire need of Augustus as its savior. But this is not tragedy but politics; no one kills himself but strikes a bargain to support an illegitimate power that will in return protect him. What is needed is the appearance of legitimacy, which is why this tension resolves itself in the language of the "look." The emphasis on looking both reveals and compensates for an original loss; if we can think of it as a system of exchange—an economy of the gaze—it implies the loss of a general equivalent that anchors sociopolitical reality and at the same time supplements it. But like the specter, the supplement is a negative presence; whatever it supplies also marks the place of absence.⁹ Thus the image represents a power that depends upon supplanting and co-opting its predecessor.¹⁰

Caesar's accomplishment is hyperbolically described as having "changed the look of the cosmos." The new order has a "new look," which can be understood both objectively as referring to its appearance, or subjectively, to its power of sight (LSJ 1 and 2). This legal document thus links visual awareness with the critical moment of political exchange, reinforcing the supplementarity of the principate—Caesar changed the ways things looked by putting himself in a position heretofore unknown, and dissembled the transition—as well as the difference it made in the way people saw this change. Speaking of tragedy, Aristotle uses the expression ὁ τῆς ὄψεως κόσμος to distinguish one of its chief characteristics: ἐπεὶ δὲ πρῶτον μὲν ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἂν εἴη τι μῦθον τραγωδίας ὁ τῆς ὄψεως κόσμος. εἶτα μελοποιία καὶ λέξις ("Since actors perform the representation, necessarily the order of the spectacle forms a certain part of the tragedy, and thereafter singing and diction," *Poet.* 1449b31–33). Aristotle's use of the expression helps to clarify the proconsul's extraordinary expression of the circumstance of sociopolitical exchange. The people need visual clues to reorient their epistemological framework, because Caesar has "rebuilt the σχῆμα." The word refers to various sorts of appearances: appearance as opposed to reality, fashion or manner, character or role, figure of speech (LSJ 3, 4, 5, 7b). Whether Caesar gives these clues or not, the desire for them inhabits contemporary official language when referring to him.

This understanding of the expression underlines the arbitrary nature of power: Caesar has not changed and degraded an original, or pure, state of the law, but rather “the order of looking,” from one to the next. The impulse to look could be considered in many forms: architecture, entertainment, the relationship of the princeps with his people, but in a functioning political state, all of these reinforce the symbolic structure of power.¹¹ With Nero, however, history deems the Julio-Claudians spent. The desire to look at images and representations is magnified into the figure of power making a spectacle of himself. This phenomenon is not just the product of a crazy emperor’s whims; as the stand-in for the enervation of the system, it is the logical and necessary outcome of this historical process. By 69, however, the phenomenon of spectacle appears both as an expression of the tension between republic and empire and of the attenuation of the Julio-Claudian principate. There were now no longer any Julio-Claudians, and hence nowhere to “look.” What could supplement the supplement?¹²

By Domitian’s time, the significance of the visual assumes a new and more menacing form than it had under Nero: *Nero tamen subtraxit oculos suos iussitque scelera, non spectavit: praecipua sub Domitiano miserrimarum pars erat videre et aspici, cum suspiria nostra subscriberentur, cum denotandis tot hominum palloribus sufficeret saevus ille vultus et rubor, quo se contra pudorem muniebat* (“But Nero withdrew his eyes as he ordered crimes; he did not watch them: under Domitian the principal part of our miseries was to see and be seen, since our sighs were noted, since that savage face and the flush with which he fortified himself against shame were equal to marking down the blanchings of so many men,” *Agr.* 45.2). This passage, like the descriptions of Nero on the stage, indicates that Nero’s involvement with spectacle is narcissistic and therefore one-sided: he makes a spectacle of himself, but not of the crimes he commits. The leader still directs the “look” of the public, except that this look, transformative under Augustus, has become informative. Nero reveals the fiction; he *is* the fiction. But people are looking at him, not he at them. Domitian, by contrast, makes the gaze reciprocal; but, instead of making himself available to the public eye, he hides behind the enigmatic blush that we discover also in the *Histories’* portrait of him at 4.40.1, where “the frequent embarrassment of his face was taken as a sign of modesty, since his character was still unknown” (*et ignotis adhuc moribus crebra oris confusio pro modestia accipiebatur*); and—a related dissimulation, though not in the form of a blush—at 4. 86.2, where he “concealed himself in loftiness by the appearance of simplicity and modesty and by pretending a zeal for letters and love of poems” (*simplicitatis*

ac modestiae imagine in altitudinem conditus studiumque litterarum et amorem carminum simulans).¹³

Under Domitian, then, the gaze is reciprocal but unequal, as he has the power to survey his subjects while remaining partially obscure himself. This is a measure of tyranny that did not obtain under Nero despite his nighttime forays in disguise, because even these became known (*Ann.* 13.25.2). Nevertheless, the move that has been made between the two regimes is not one of progressive but simple concealment. Domitian's blush is like the painted curtain of Parrahasios, which fooled his rival Zeuxis into asking him to lift it and reveal the painting underneath—a situation that Lacan calls “the triumph of the gaze over the eye.”¹⁴ Like Nero's stage appearances, the blush reveals more than it conceals, except that under Nero there was some tangible presence with which the audience could engage, even be complicit. In the *Agricola* passage, Tacitus triangulates Domitian's *rubor* and his potential victims' *pallor* through the *pudor* against which he must fortify himself. *Pudor* does not have a color; it can be discerned only negatively, through *rubor*. It is therefore a state that can only be imagined, or assumed to exist, since there is no evidence in Domitian's behavior that the color of his face has any significance at all; other authors, while noting his color, do not lend it the same interpretation as does Tacitus.¹⁵ Tacitus therefore emphasizes that what the blush conceals is absence; this regime, unlike Nero's, demonstrates the absolute lack (of legitimate power, *libertas*, etc.) for which it fills in. With Nero, there was still a show, whereas Domitian only deceives, and does so with a pretense at concealment.

Rubor allows Domitian to tyrannize his subjects because it plays at being something: *pudor*. It must exist in order to give meaning to this tyranny, during which, as Tacitus explicitly says, *our* hands did violence, Senecio “drenched us with his innocent blood” (*nos innocenti sanguine Senecio perfudit*, *Agr.* 45.1–2). Senecio's blood suffuses the rest of the Senate like a blush, following the metaphorical definition of *perfundere* as “imbue with emotion” (*OLD* 5a). The bloody blush covers both sides of the power structure; it masks Domitian's lack of shame and the senators' lack of guilt. For the imperial subject, it manufactures the difference between guilt and innocence, thereby filling up the hole in the symbolic order that is left by such unconstitutional cruelty; hence it is “equal to the task of” or “sufficient for” (*sufficeret*) noting down the pallor of its victims (*OLD* b7). In this passage, Tacitus exposes the excuse convenient after a reign of terror: we did it because we had to. We are not guilty. Again, however, Tacitus shows that the real horror was not coerced injustice, but a participation that was both voluntary and unavoidable. To escape this, the blush is in-

voked in order to sustain the belief that the “guilt” of the emperor produces the “innocence” of the senators.

The significance of *sufficere* as “dye” or “tinge” (OLD a3) is surely not accidental here. Although it is a transitive use of the verb, it resonates: if the blush *blushes* the pallor of others into existence, *pallor* and *rubor* are falsely distinguished, as the former becomes a shade of the latter. Thus Tacitus reminds us that the only thing Domitian’s blush hides is “our” own fantasy of significance, or meaning, a kind of co-consciousness that does not exist under Nero.¹⁶ Nero is the actor; Domitian the curtain. The difference resides in the movement of the gaze: Nero is still a visible object, whereas Domitian represents the concealed lack of an object.¹⁷

One of the most powerful messages in the *Agricola* concerns the difficulty of making appearances stand for something when tyranny makes it impossibly traumatic to reconcile oneself with the “self in its otherness.” Tacitus’s praise of his father-in-law is sincere, but laced with bitterness: Julius Agricola did make appearances count, but at the price of his ignorance. When Agricola boasts that he could have taken Ireland, if given one legion and a few auxiliaries, and wipe out liberty “as if from sight” (*velut e conspectu*, 24.3), the irony of the statement is that Agricola thinks it desirable to destroy *libertas* but does not realize that the *libertas* of the Romans themselves diminishes with every other territory they subjugate. Agricola misperceives *libertas* as that which Romans have and foreigners do not. This attitude makes it desirable to find new foreigners to subdue, in order to bolster one’s “vision” of oneself. In this regard, the narrative progression of his statement matters: *saepe ex eo audiui legione una et modicis auxiliis debellari obtinerique Hiberniam posse; idque etiam adversus Britanniam profuturum, si Romana ubique arma et velut e conspectu libertas tolleretur* (“Often I heard from him that with one legion and a few auxiliaries Ireland could be fought and conquered; that this would also be a benefit against Britain, if Roman arms were everywhere; and *libertas* would be removed as if from sight). Agricola begins by speaking of Ireland, where *libertas* still exists; moves on to Britain, where it does not (but might again, if inspired by its neighbor); and finally asserts that if Roman arms are everywhere, *libertas* will vanish from sight—namely, from everywhere. When Tacitus expresses his regret over the untimeliness of Agricola’s death, it is because the latter did not live “to the light of this most happy age, and to see Trajan as princeps” (*in hanc beatissimi saeculi lucem ac principem Traianum videre*, 44.5)—a time when the empty gaze that reflects only imitations is again able to see.

In the *Histories*, Tacitus makes Vitellius more than either of the other

two pretenders the inheritor, transformer, and transmitter of the Neronian gaze. Language is the main problem of Galba and Otho, the metaphor that captures their stints in power. Vitellius's is the hungry eye that searches for an image of legitimacy. In the *Republic*, Socrates tells a story about Leontios that informs this characterization of Vitellius. Leontios, on his way to Athens, sees a heap of corpses in the executioner's yard by the city walls. He wants to look at them but feels ashamed of himself. Finally, tormented, he gives in to his desire, saying: ἰδοὺ ὑμῖν, ὦ κακοδαίμονες, ἐμπλήσθητε τοῦ καλοῦ θεάματος ("Look for yourselves, you miserable wretches, stuff yourselves on the beautiful sight," *Rep.* 439e–440a). The story suggests that the connection between vision and hunger expresses the desire for legitimate power; in Platonic terms, for power and justice together. When Vitellius looked at the murdered Junius Blaesus, as I discussed in chapter 1, unlike Leontios, he willingly looked at a scene of death without expressing any shame over the impulse. But the striking similarity lies in the description of the gluttonous eye. In both cases, the individuals feel a desire to look at the kind of death that can confirm their experience of power and of justice: that is, the bodies of those they want to believe are criminals. The exercise of power and the experience of justice are incompatible but mutually reinforcing: justice becomes whatever the irrational exercise of power uses to confirm its identity.

Leontios does not know whether these dead men who lie in the executioner's yard were guilty, but he wills it to be so. Vitellius is the murderer of Blaesus but wishes Blaesus to be the criminal. This incompatibility creates a void that the greedy eye can fill. The experience of "glutting the eye" comes at the expense of a splitting of the soul, some part of which recoils from what Seth Benardete calls "the shamefulness of vicarious revenge,"¹⁸ and assigns that shame to the eyes, which become both satiated and guilty. What Socrates calls *thumos*—anger—represents that part of the soul that knows itself only through the mediation of desire, in this case the greedy eyes, and is therefore eternally empty. It projects its own will to power through the eyes, through which it vicariously satisfies its hunger.

This will to power manifests itself in Vitellius on a grand scale during his visit to the battlefield at Bedriacum:

Inde Vitellius Cremonam flexit et spectato munere Caecinae insistere Bedriacensibus campis ac vestigia recentis victoriae lustrare oculos concupivit. foedum atque atrox spectaculum, intra quadragensimum pugnae diem lacera corpora, trunci artus, putres virorum equorumque formae, infecta tabo humus, protritit arboribus ac frugibus dira vastitas. (2.70.1)

From thence Vitellius turned toward Cremona, and after having watched the gladiatorial games put on by Caecina conceived the desire to halt at the field of Bedriacum and review the signs of the recent victory. It was a disgusting and dreadful sight: within forty days of the battle there lay mutilated bodies, limbs chopped off, the rotting carcasses of men and horses. The ground was foul with decay, and there was terrible devastation to the flattened trees and crops.¹⁹

The close syntactical alliance between the games and the visit to the battlefield in the first sentence of the chapter suggests that the former engenders in Vitellius the desire to see the “real thing.” The games have no stakes, at least not for the spectators; what Vitellius desires from the sight of the battlefield is the knowledge that he has right on his side. For this reason, his gaze is purificatory as well as sensory. *Lustrare* can be used for the purification of an army before an expedition, or of the expiation of an event (OLD 1b and c); Tacitus uses it at 4.3 for the way the Senate views the civil war now that Vespasian has won it: *quippe sumpta per Gallias Hispaniasque civilia arma, motis ad bellum Germaniis, mox Illyrico, postquam Aegyptum Iudaeam Syriamque et omnis provincias exercitusque lustraverant, velut expiato terrarum orbe cepisse finem videbantur* (“Indeed, the civil wars, having arisen in Gaul and Spain, with the Germanies and then Illyricum moved to war, after they had spread to Egypt, Judaea, Syria, and all the provinces and armies, seemed to have come to an end as if with the whole globe expiated”). The cause of the victor must be made to appear just, hence the urgency with which Vitellius wishes to exchange the vision of death as a game (where it does not “count”) for death as an expression of punishment (against enemies who are “wrong”). But the terrible thing about this scene is not the battlefield itself, it is the fact that what he sees at Bedriacum is in essence no different from the games; at both, the stakes are erased unless one happens to be a partisan. Vitellius did not have any part in the battle, he merely wishes to look at the aftermath and have the various maneuvers recreated for him by his generals, while the survivors “were mixing up false things, true things, and exaggerations on the truth” (*falsa vera aut maiora vero miscebant*). Soon the rest of his army joins in, gazing and admiring the scene (*intueri mirari*).

Vitellius wills the difference between the two events, a difference that Tacitus marks with the phrase *foedum atque atrox spectaculum*. It is right for one to look at the games—they are a *munus*, an entertainment—but not the battlefield. Thus the new emperor differentiates between the arena and war based upon a desire to legitimate his victory, whereas the historian does so from apparently moral considerations. But Vitellius’s victory has

not made him just, and Tacitus's remark about the battlefield only underlines the strange logic of an emperor and a society that would make these distinctions. What the historian shows us in this moment is the ideology of spectacle; that is, the current fiction that spectacles still exist as a distinct phenomenon in a world where there is nothing else.

Tacitus draws attention to this paradigm on two other notable occasions: his description of the people dressed up by Domitian as Germans in order to celebrate a false triumph (*Agr.* 39.1), and the destruction of the Bructeri (*Germ.* 33). The latter passage underscores the theme of Vitellius's visit to Bedriacum:

Iuxta Tencteros Bructeri olim occurrebant: nunc Chamavos et Angrivarios imigrasse narratur, pulsus Bructeris ac penitus excisis vicinarum consensu nationum, seu superbiae odio seu praedae dulcedine seu favore quodam erga nos deorum. nam ne spectaculo quidem proelii invidere: super sexaginta milia non armis telisque Romanis sed, quod magnificentius est, oblectationi oculisque ceciderunt. maneat, quaeso, duretque gentibus, si non amor nostri, at certe odium sui, quando urgentibus imperii fatis nihil iam praestare fortuna maius potest quam hostium discordiam.

Once the Bructeri were adjacent to the Tencteri: now the Chamavi and Angrivarii are said to have moved there, since the Bructeri have been driven out and cut to pieces from within by the consensus of neighboring nations, either out of hatred for their pride or the irresistibility of booty or some kind of divine favor toward us. For it did not even begrudge the spectacle of a battle: over sixty thousand fell, not by Roman arms and weapons, but, what is more splendid, for the pleasure of our eyes. May there long remain for these nations, I pray, if not their love of us, at least their hatred of themselves, since now that the fate of the Empire moves quickly on, fortune can provide nothing greater than the discord of our enemies.

In this remarkable passage, Tacitus links the Roman understanding of empire as the object of a gaze with its decline, a time when it has lost the power of positive action and must rely for its success upon the self-destruction of its enemies. No Roman was even there for this battle, yet it is perceived as a *spectaculum* put on for Roman enjoyment. This account distinguishes between spectacle and battle—the spectacle is “more splendid”—yet here the two have been collapsed into one, and the distinction appears doubly spurious. The battle between the German tribes is a *munus* for the Romans, and it is only when their own men are involved that war becomes *foedum atque atrox*, but a *spectaculum* nonetheless.²⁰

When Vitellius's soldiers feel pity and sorrow at the fate that brought the battle about, Tacitus plays on Vergil's famous phrase *lacrimae rerum* (*Aen.* 1.462): *et erant quos varia sors rerum lacrimaeque et misericordia subiret* ("and there were those who were affected by the shifting fate of things, and tears, and pity," 2.70.3). Tacitus connects *rerum* with *sors*, not with *lacrimae*, although the Vergilian pairing occurs in the middle of the sentence and immediately attracts our attention. Vergil assigns it to Aeneas, in a speech about the images of the Trojan War carved upon the walls in the temple of Juno. The verb Vergil uses for Aeneas's inspection of the images is *lustrare*, closely followed by *mirari* and *videre* for his amazement at the things he sees. What he sees is similar to the sight that confronts Vitellius and his men: death and destruction, as the carvings show the carnage wrought by Diomedes and Achilles. Aeneas "feeds his heart on the empty picture" (*animum pictura pascit inani*, 1.464); in a similar fashion Vitellius "boasted that he had fed his eyes upon the watched death" of his enemy [Junius Blaesus]" (*se [. . .] pavisse oculos spectata inimici morte iactavit*, 3.39.1).

The cannibalistic gaze illustrates the emptiness of a power that cannot define itself except through the mediation of desire. Vitellius's gaze over the battlefield at Bedriacum represents the lack that is not only a feature of his own short regime but the truth of the principate as a whole, although it does not manifest itself until this moment. If we remember the *Agricola*, the difference between Domitian and Nero was that the latter did not watch his crimes, so something has changed in the interim. Nero does not have greedy eyes because of the narcissism that characterizes his rule: the hole in the symbolic order has not yet blown wide open, necessitating the insatiable and self-devouring gaze. What Vitellius wants is the legitimation of his own power, but the power of the princeps is such that the victory of any battle, belonging only to him even if he is not there, can only be represented.

Aeneas wants sympathy from the picture of the war; he wants *lacrimae rerum*. He believes that such images demonstrate the compassion of the place that houses them, and that his entourage will be safe here, but he is mistaken. The carving is completely neutral; it demonstrates nothing, although Aeneas wishes to assign it a significance useful to himself. His eye is hungry for what the picture can only evoke, not provide. Similarly, Vitellius wants to believe that he won rightly, that is, because his cause was just, but the insatiability that is characteristic of his personality as a whole represents the emptiness of his victory. The soldiers who feel pity for what

they interpret as the vagaries of fortune nevertheless, like their leader, in the very act of looking, transform the scene to the neutrality of an image. Tacitus here embeds a reading of the *Aeneid* as the history of the imperial use of images, while giving the reader an image of Vergil that is compelling but at the same time flawed (the phrase is not in fact the Vergilian one). This fractured image of an image draws the reader experientially into the blankness of this simulacral world.

Whatever the soldiers think they see and feel, Vitellius refuses to turn away his eyes from the scene: *at non Vitellius non flexit oculos, nec tot milia insepultorum civium exhorruit: laetus ultro et tam propinquae sortis ignarus instaurabat sacrum dis loci* ("But Vitellius did not avert his eyes, nor did so many thousands of unburied citizens shock him. Conversely, pleased and ignorant of the fate that loomed so close, he renewed the rite to the gods of the place," 2.70.4). *Flexit* here picks up *flexit* in the first sentence of the chapter, where Vitellius was "turning aside" to Cremona; thus looking becomes a detour from which there is no re-turning.²¹ As if to seal the transition and authorize his victory, Vitellius, unmoved by the desecration around him, makes an offering to new gods. But these are the "gods of the place"; they mark the place of his gaze and the concomitant degeneration of symbolic plenitude. *Instaurare* is used by Cicero and Livy most often in connection with games. Vitellius's actions at Bedriacum are narratively framed by his visits to the games given by Caecina and Valens; his rites therefore in some measure share the qualities of the desire to gaze.²² In sacrificing, Vitellius demonstrates an erroneous belief and trust in the machinations of a fate that have brought him victory; hence Tacitus's bizarre statement that Vitellius is "ignorant of his approaching fate." Moments before, the soldiers had bemoaned the "shifting fate of things," and this would seem to be the appropriate model of events for the historian as well. It could be said of all historical characters that they are ignorant of their fates. But Tacitus shows us how, by carrying out an act of religious piety but misunderstanding the nature of it, Vitellius both makes the model of a necessary fate for himself and remains ignorant of its fatal consequences.

To return to the *Republic's* story of Leontios, Socrates describes the relationship of different parts of the soul as a civil war, in which, when desire fights with reason, *thumos* allies itself with the latter. Socratic *thumos* is that which always (mis)recognizes itself through the mediation of a third element; that is, it recognizes itself symbolically.²³ Glaucon objects to the "true city" that Socrates first creates, because it omits meat, tables, and couches. He asks: "If you were arranging a city of pigs, Socrates, what else

would you be feeding them?" (373d3). Glaucon's tone is contemptuous; he thinks of himself as above such piglike people.²⁴ In desiring tables and couches, however, he connects that which would satisfy his desire (food) with that which would delay its satisfaction but also symbolically "make him somebody"—namely, a civilized man, not a pig. Glaucon wants not just meat, but the symbolic satisfaction that the mode of eating it gives him. *Thumos* always understands itself as reasonable, just as Glaucon thinks it reasonable that Socrates' invented city should have attributes similar to those of the city he knows: Athens. It seems reasonable to him to think of the city that lacks such refinements as a pig city. Similarly, Leontios offloads the need to look on the corpses onto the "hunger" of his eyes because the part of his soul that is guided by *thumos* convinces itself that, *qua* rational, it could never want such a thing. And Vitellius's *thumos* materializes in his sacrifice to the gods of the battlefield, whom he interprets as propitious representatives of the justice of his victory. However, these gods are not friendly to a new, just, and prosperous regime but rather to one that has lost the proper orientation of images to reality. In such a situation, images reflect other images and become murderously interchangeable.

Throughout the Julio-Claudian principate, in Tacitus's view, images reflect a progressively unstable symbolic order. Under Augustus, images dissimulate something: that the princeps has ultimate power but pretends he does not. The fact that both aspects are credible keeps the reality principle intact and creates a "good image" for Augustus himself. In the transition between him and the evil Tiberius, a degeneration of images occurs that is again embodied in the princeps himself, who "masks and perverts" the relationship between images and reality. It becomes increasingly obvious that "reality" lies within the mind of the tyrant, which is opaque. The images of Nero-as-actor illustrate the illusory nature of the princeps's power; and finally the regimes of the pretenders of 69 necessarily become images of the image—simulacra—where any orientation toward a referent has dropped away. The Julio-Claudians are therefore "real deceivers," as opposed to the pretenders, who are "false deceivers." By the time of Domitian, as I argued in the analysis of his *rubor*, the deception is doubly false, as he pretends to deceive—a level of self-consciousness not yet attained in 69.²⁵

In a functional society, the sacred is the ultimate symbolic reference; but Vitellius mixes up the functions of spectacle and religion, purifying the battlefield and giving the sacrifice as he would a game. This scene of his gaze invites the simulacrum to be the order of reality. And the simulacral is the most savage of regimes. In the *Annals*, Tacitus tells us that slander and spite

against good people go increasingly unpunished because of the malefactors' practice of using the emperor's image as a form of sanctuary: *incedebat enim deterrimo cuique licentia impune probra et invidiam in bonos excitandi arrepta imagine Caesaris* (3.36). The senator Gaius Cestius addresses this problem, arguing that although emperors are godlike, even gods hear only the prayers of the just: *igitur C. Cestius senator disseruit principes quidem instar deorum esse, sed neque a diis nisi iustas supplicum preces audiri*. The expression *instar deorum* ("equivalent to the gods"), though perhaps textually too far removed from Vitellius's action of "renewing the rites [*instaurare*] to the gods of the place," at least reminds us of that event through the ancient (though false) etymological connection between *instar* and *instaurare*.²⁶ Vitellius mixes up gods with games, and Tiberius's public uses images of emperors to sanctify injustice; both acts illustrate the cruelty of a society that now identifies only with images that have lost their symbolic anchor. The terrible scene of the battlefield bears witness to the far greater degeneration of this problem by the year 69.²⁷

Vitellius is not usually a cruel man; he appears in the narrative more often as a pitiful character.²⁸ The only other instance of cruelty is also a narrative about the gaze: his murder of Junius Blaesus at 3.39. The populace seems to recognize this discrepancy in Vitellius's behavior:

Tum duos omnium mortalium impudicitia ignavia luxuria deterrimos velut ad perdendum imperium fataliter electos non senatus modo et eques, quis aliqua pars et cura rei publicae, sed volgus quoque palam maerere. nec iam recentia saevae pacis exempla, sed repetita bellorum civilium memoria captam totiens suis exercitibus urbem, vastitatem Italiae, direptiones provinciarum, Pharsaliam Philippos et Perusiam ac Mutinam, nota publicarum cladum nomina, loquebantur. prope eversum orbem etiam cum de principatu inter bonos certaretur, sed mansisse C. Iulio, mansisse Caesare Augusto victore imperium; mansuram fuisse sub Pompeio Brutoque rem publicam; nunc pro Othone an pro Vitellio in templa ituros? utrasque impias preces, utraque detestanda vota inter duos, quorum bello solum id scires, deteriore fore qui vicisset. (1.50.1–3)

Then not only the Senate and the knights, who had some share in and concern for the state, but also the populace openly grieved, for the fact that two of the worst of all mortals because of their shamelessness, sloth, and luxury had been chosen by fate, as if for the destruction of *imperium*. They were not speaking of the recent examples of a savage peace, but remembering civil wars, of their city captured so often by their own armies, the devastation of Italy, sacking of the provinces; of Pharsalia, Philippi, Perusia, and Mutina,

names well known for public disaster. They said that the world had been nearly turned on its head even when honorable men struggled for the principate; but *imperium* had remained throughout the victories of Julius Caesar and of Augustus, and so would the Republic have done under Pompey and Brutus. Now should they go to the temples for Otho or Vitellius? Prayers for either would be impious, vows to be cursed among two men, of whose war you could know only one thing: that the winner would be the worse.

The public compares the present contenders for power with those of past civil wars in terms of “good” and “bad.” It understands the two warring regimes, *imperium* and Republic, as sustainable on the basis of the goodness of their respective champions, whereas the present situation similarly looks dire because of the nature of the candidates. But the public forgets that *imperium* withstood several leaders whose qualities hardly matched those of its inceptors, and therefore ignores the nature of power in their world. The people, though they also grieve, expect and almost seem to hope for the destruction that they see as imminent, as they both see Otho and Vitellius as having been chosen specifically for the purpose and know that whoever wins will necessarily be the worse. The situation cannot resolve in both ways: either *imperium* will be destroyed, or it will remain to suffer the abuses of one who is not *bonus*. The people thus at least partially understand the consequences brought about by the paradigm of the simulacrum, and want an end of it; similarly, the people of the proconsul’s letter about the new calendar expressed the desire to have embraced total destruction if Augustus had not arrived on the scene—Augustus, who in bestowing a whole new look saved them from the abyss.

The coda to this passage refers to Vespasian: *erant qui Vespasianum et arma Orientis augurarentur, et ut potior utroque Vespasianus, ita bellum aliud atque alias clades horrebant. et ambigua de Vespasiano fama, solusque omnium ante se principum in melius mutatus est* (“There were those who foretold Vespasian and the arms of the East, and just as Vespasian was stronger than either [Otho or Vitellius], so they shuddered at another war and another disaster. Reports of Vespasian were dubious, and he alone of all the *principes* before him was changed for the better,” 1.50.4). The information about Vespasian is difficult to sort out, particularly as Tacitus changes focalizers several times: at first he shifts from the people who worry about Otho and Vitellius to those who predict Vespasian, but after that, the subject of *horrebant* is unclear. It could be everyone, or just those who have been talking about Vespasian. Whoever focalizes at this point does so on Vespasian, but receives only information uncertain as to content

and provenance; after which an omniscient voice tells us what happened after he came to power. The passive of *mutatus est* detracts from the compliment, indicating that an agent other than Vespasian himself is responsible for his transformation, perhaps a public for whom this new paradigm creates new boundaries, new ways of seeing?

After Vitellius makes his sacrifice at Bedriacum, he returns to a show—the gladiatorial games given by Valens at Bononia—and continues on his way to Rome, accompanied by a retinue described by Tacitus as encompassing all the worst elements of Nero's court: *quantoque magis propinquabat, tanto corruptius iter immixtis histrionibus et spadonum gregibus et cetero Neronianae aulae ingenio; namque et Neronem ipsum Vitellius admiratione celebrabat, sectari cantatantem solitus, non necessitate, qua honestissimus quisque, sed luxu et saginae mancipatus emptusque* ("The closer he got [to Rome], the more corrupt his journey became, with actors joining in and crowds of eunuchs, and the rest of the talent of the Neronian court. For Vitellius used to lavish admiration even on Nero himself, regularly attending his singing performances, not out of necessity, as all the most honorable people did, but because he had been bought and sold for luxury and gluttony," 2.71.1). Earlier in the text, Otho succeeded because of his ability to remind the public of Nero; he invoked Nero's absence, and therefore the public's desire. Now Tacitus connects Vitellius with the dead emperor through the element of spectacle, describing him as an adoring fan, uncritical of any impropriety.

Vitellius's chief weakness is his excessive appetite, a characteristic that the literary tradition often associates with tyrannical behavior, and that other authors use to characterize him as a tyrant (Ash 1999: 96–105).²⁹ As Rhiannon Ash demonstrates, Vitellius appears pathetic more often than cruel, which she interprets as Tacitus's emphasis on the detrimental effects this debauched regime had on its soldiers, who in turn enacted most of the violence. This argument is persuasive in terms of a comparison between Tacitus and the other authors of these events, but the connection between looking and eating for which I have argued suggests that Tacitus's emphasis on Vitellius's gluttony has ramifications beyond its immediate context. Eating signifies the problem of the empty gaze embodied by this regime, and further a whole culture of civil war. The gaze is hungry for a violence, or transgression, that reestablishes the symbolic boundary of law. Tacitus's depiction of Vitellius's cruelty concerns itself less with the emperor's character or morals than with integrating the need to see violence with the need to be in the right. In Vitellius, we see the personification of a historical moment at which the emptiness of the old symbolic

order engenders a crisis of legitimacy. The eye fills in and fills up on the spectacle of cruelty that manufactures crazy distinctions between right and wrong. In the time of Nero, spectacle had not yet assumed a significance of this kind. His death was the cause of the vacuum that brought the element of violent spectacle together with that of the hunger to see it: though he “feeds his heart,” Aeneas only does so on what is already a representation, a *pictura inanis*. In Vitellius’s world, by contrast, we are drawn into what is always already a picture by virtue of his, and by extension our, looking at it. This minor flashback that illustrates Vitellius’s admiration of Nero, and that focuses not on the latter but on his admiring successor, illustrates the moment of transformation from one paradigm into another and foreshadows the results.

IMPERSONATIONS

After Valens’s gladiatorial games at Bononia, Vitellius and his retinue participate in two more shows on their way to Rome: first, a charade intended to remove three consuls-elect in order to make room for Valens and Caecina. To get rid of Martius Macer, Vitellius feigns ignorance of his upcoming consulship on the grounds that he was a supporter of Otho: [*consulatus*] *dissimulatus Marti Macri tamquam Othonianarum partium ducis*.³⁰ In this case, then, Vitellius acts according to the ancient definition of dissimulation: he conceals something that is actually there. Next, he defers (*distulit*) the consulship of Valerius Marinus to which the latter had been nominated by Galba; and finally, Pedanius Costa’s name is entirely omitted because he had been an adversary of Nero. In this case, however, Vitellius actually invents other reasons for dropping the man. The new emperor accomplishes three important maneuvers using these three men as surrogates: he cancels Otho by pretending his political decisions do not exist; he re-regulates the decisions of Galba by postponing them so that they will come under the rubric of his own regime; and he fabricates excuses in order to destroy the trace of one who had been hostile to Nero. Bearing in mind that this passage immediately follows the description of Vitellius’s admiration of Nero, we can infer that the progression leading to his erasure of Costa betrays a desire to go back, to replay a Neronian scenario. In the next chapter, he does.

In 2.72, a case of impersonation occurs in which a man claims to be Scribonianus Camerinus. Camerinus, a victim of Nero, had fled to Histria where his family, the Crassi, had property and retainers.³¹ The imperson-

ator summons the dregs of the community “for the plot of his play” (*de-terrimo quoque in argumentum fabulae adsumpto*), and the local populace and soldiers eagerly join in the charade “in error as to the truth or because of the enthusiasm of the crowd” (*errore veri seu turbarum studio*). The man appears before Vitellius and is asked his identity, but “there was no credibility in his statement” (*nulla dictis fides*); his master recognizes him as a runaway slave named Geta, and he is put to death “in the slavish fashion” (*in servilem modum*)—that is, crucifixion.

The incident begins in the world of spectacle and fiction—the impersonation is an *argumentum* and a *fabula*—but quickly advances to another level as Tacitus describes the crowd’s reaction, which demonstrates either a lack of perception or what we know to be its usual enthusiasm for trouble. The former implies that it really did believe Geta was Scribonianus, the latter that who he was did not really matter. Given that Tacitus says the crowd is credulous (*volgus credulum*), however, the distinction between the two is compromised, and what the crowd believes is not a reliable indicator of the truth or falsehood of the circumstance. Geta is a theatrical figure in whom Tacitus merges elements of truth and fiction, as he blurs his own narrative voice with that of the imposter: *extiterat quidam Scribonianum se Camerinum ferens, Neronianorum temporum metu in Histria occultatum, quod illic clientelae et agri veterum Crassorum ac nominis favor manebat* (“A certain person had emerged, passing himself off as Scribonianus Camerinus, who had been concealed [or because he had been concealed] in the terror of the Neronian era in Histria, since there were still in this place clients and lands of the old family of the Crassi, and the influence of the name,” 2.72.1). The participle *occultatum* divides the narratorial voice between the explanation of identity (who Scribonianus is) and of motivation (why his identity might be attractive to an adventurer) and also allows for the possibility of the imposter’s voice, explaining its own motivation. Chilver (on 72.2) recognizes this ambiguity and suggests that “the indicative *manebat* in the *quod* clause implies that [*occultatum* affirms what Tacitus’ source believes to be the case.]” But he asks a pointed question: “What then happened to the real Scribonianus?” In a story about impersonation and false identity this seems to be an important question. What happens to Scribonianus, in fact, is a narrative sleight of hand in which two stories merge in the person of the imposter and are then eliminated with his death.

On the one hand, the real Scribonianus was a relative of Piso Caesar, Galba’s adopted son, through the clan of the Crassi. His reappearance, as Chilver points out, would therefore represent a threat to Vitellius’s claim

on the principate. On the other, runaway slaves are not allowed to assume other identities and pass themselves off as aristocrats. When Geta is dragged before Vitellius, the latter asks him rather an odd question, *quisnam mortalium esset* ("who of mortal men he was"), thus asserting that whoever he is, he has no claim on the divinizing structure of the principate.³² Geta and Scribonianus become interchangeable enemies of Vitellius's order, of whom one pays the price, whereas the other is simply passed over by the narrative, as if not only he but the threat that he represents had been eliminated. Geta's real crime is that the structure of his deception is that of an impersonator of an impersonator (i.e., potential pretender), which makes him too close for Vitellius's comfort. Tacitus implicitly parodies the "real" state of imperial affairs in his description of Geta's retinue, in which "all the worst sorts had been taken up (*adsumpto*) into the plot of the play (*in argumentum fabulae*)", a brief glimpse of the truth that is quickly concealed again when "the punishment was taken up (*sumptum*) by [Geta] in slavish fashion (*in servilem modum*)" (2.72.2). The punishment makes the impersonation seem fake, but the similar syntactical structure of the two statements indicates only a superficial difference between the two.³³

In this incident, Vitellius picks up a thread—Scribonianus—left hanging in the Neronian narrative and spins it out to a climax and denouement. But this is not Scribonianus, and Vitellius is not Nero. Together they do not play out a story about the punishment of concealed reality so much as about a mutually constituted image of a story. The break between chapters 2.71 and 72 seems wrong, as Vitellius progresses from denying what is there, in the case of Macer's consulship, to inventing what is not there, in the case of the false Scribonianus. The sight of Bedriacum fixes his perspective, so that his political understanding instantly tends toward the model of simulacrum.

Geta's charade is one of several impersonation incidents in the *Histories*, an important parallel to which is the impersonation by another slave (from Pontus) of Nero himself (2.8–9). We hear that his talents as a singer and player of the *cithara*, in addition to a facial resemblance to the dead emperor, win the credence of some vagabond army deserters whom he bribes with promises. Together they set sail but are driven ashore at Cythnus, where he compels some troops on leave from the East to join him in robbing businessmen and arming the strongest of their slaves in his cause. He attempts to win the support of a centurion named Sisenna, a delegate from the Syrian army who has arrived with tokens of friendship for the praetorians, but Sisenna escapes. This incident causes widespread panic,

which induces many malcontents to rally round the false Nero as a famous and familiar figure. But the deception comes to an abrupt halt when Calpurnius Asprenas, governor of Galatia and Pamphilia, puts in at Cynthus en route to the East, discovers the charade, and executes the charlatan. The body is taken to Asia and then to Rome.

Unlike Geta, however, this imposter's "real" identity is never revealed in any way. Chilver (ad loc.), following a more general trend for taking Tacitus's either-or alternatives as evidence of his uncertainty in the matter, suggests that Tacitus is confused and conflates the incident with the slave revolt narrated in 3.47. However, the man's lack of identity contributes vitally to this narrative of appearances. Tacitus even gives him two roles, each of which describes him very differently: on the one hand, he is "Nero" in facial feature, voice, musical skill, and acting ability: *tunc servus e Pontesive, ut alii tradidere, libertinus ex Italia, citharae et cantus peritus, unde illi super similitudinem oris propior ad fallendum fides, adiunctis desertoribus, quos inopia vagos ingentibus promissis conruperat, mare ingreditur* ("at that time a slave from Pontus, or, as some have it, a freedman from Italy, skilled in lyre-playing and singing, whence in addition to the likeness of the face came a plausibility that made deception easier. After some deserters had joined him, whom, adrift and impoverished, he had bribed with lavish promises, he set sail," 2.8.1).³⁴ After death, however, the description of his appearance is more ambiguous: *caput, insigne oculis comaque et torvitate voltus, in Asiam atque inde Romam pervectum est* ("His body/head, conspicuous for its eyes, hair, and the ferocity of its expression, was conveyed to Asia and thence to Rome," 2.9.2).³⁵ *Insigne oculis comaque* suggests that the body was "conspicuous" for its resemblance to Nero, but *torvitas* is not characteristic of the dead emperor.³⁶ The body could therefore be anyone, who upon his death is *insignis* and has a *torvitas voltus* because he has been a threat to Roman order. Tacitus emphasizes the man's lack of identity when he is captured and killed: *sed Asprenati cuncta ex fide nuntiata; cuius cohortatione expugnata navis et interfectus quisquis ille erat* ("But everything was announced to Asprenas in good faith; by whose orders the [imposter's] ship was captured and he was killed, whoever he was," 2.9.2).

Initially, the distance between the man and the "real" Nero results not only from the fact that the latter is dead, but also because the imitation is of Nero-as-actor.³⁷ In addition, the man wins over supporters "with lavish promises" (*ingentibus promissis*) and attempts to deceive Asprenas's men with a show of melancholy into taking him to Syria or Egypt (*is in maestitiam compositus et fidem suorum quondam militum invocans, ut eum in*

Syria aut Aegypto sisterent, orabat, 2.9.2), just as Vitellius later puts on a show to elicit pity for his bad circumstances and makes big promises (*nec deerat ipse voltu voce lacrimis misericordiam elicere, largus promissis*, 3.38.3). While the very act of imposture itself lends his charade credibility, his death abruptly severs the connection between the mystery-imposter and the emperor-imposter because they are not linked by any concrete likeness of face or expression: once the imposture is gone, so is the likeness. Accentuating the mystery by referring to the man as *quisquis ille*, Tacitus gives the reader no clue as to his identity, and therefore not a face, but a mask, behind the mask of the Neronian *persona*.

The drama of the false Nero occurs in eastern provinces: he first upsets Achaia and Asia, then puts in at the island of Cythnus, whence he tries to gain passage to Syria or Egypt from the agents sent to investigate him. In his choice of destination he anticipates Vespasian, who comes from Syria to Egypt at the beginning of his bid for the principate. Ideologically charged for the Romans as a locus of *superstitio* and suspicion, the East becomes both potentially useful and detrimental as a source of power for the new princeps. On the one hand, the miracles he performs at Alexandria (4.81) add immediate luster to his authority; on the other, that authority derives from a place where gods have no limitation of form or representation. Vespasian first discovers his future at an altar on Mount Carmel, where the deity has "neither likeness nor temple" (*nec simulacrum deo aut templum*, 2.78.3). Unlike the emperor, then, the deity cannot be faked; more importantly, it cannot be simulated. In a system that recognizes the divinity of the emperor (and Vespasian's miracles mark his divinity openly), and that recognizes Roman *religio* as integral to the state,³⁸ the possibility of simulating an emperor also implies the emptiness of the whole code. In this region of "*superstitio*," the gods are threatening because they are not vulnerable in the same way as an emperor, a vulnerability that the Nero imposter makes all too clear. As he did with Geta, Tacitus omits a motivation for the false Nero, focusing on his role as a shadow of the imperial problem.³⁹

By narrative juxtaposition, the body of the imposter brings trouble to the Senate in Rome (2.10), where Vibius Crispus attacks Annius Faustus, a knight who had been a notorious *delator* in the Neronian regime. Tacitus tells us that although the Senate under Galba had decided to prosecute these criminals, the law was ineffectual (though frightening), as it threatened only those who were less wealthy or powerful: *id senatus consultum varie iactatum et, prout potens vel inops reus inciderat, infirmum aut validum, retinebat adhuc terroris* (2.10.1). Crispus wishes to exact his revenge from Faustus, who had informed against his brother, and because of

his influence convinces most of the Senate to convict Faustus without a trial or defense. Other members argue for due process, and the case is postponed for a little while; but Faustus is condemned, less readily because people remember that his accuser had committed the same crimes. The narrative thus connects the false Nero with a trial in which the law assigns justice based upon a false distinction, so that from territory that ideology conceives as completely “other” the problem of the simulacrum penetrates the heart of the system.

In the days preceding Vitellius’s visit to Bedriacum, the news of his victory is brought both to Rome (2.55) and to himself (2.57). At Rome, the populace is holding the traditional games in honor of Ceres (*Ceriales ludi ex more spectabantur*), where they hear that Otho is dead and that the city troops have taken the oath to Vitellius. They applaud, carry busts of Galba around the temples, and place garlands at the Lacus Curtius where he died. This odd scene introduces Vitellius’s reaction to the battlefield that occurs fifteen chapters later. The people express no fear (*At Romae nihil trepidationis*) or emotion of any kind; they react as if the news were another part of the show, which they then take outside the theater. Galba’s busts (*imagines*) do not represent the “real” emperor, wrongfully killed and now avenged, but rather the emptiness of the category “emperor.” They mark Vitellius’s place in Rome interchangeably with Vitellius himself, foreshadowing the toppling of his statues in the moments preceding his death (3.85); that is, his own fate coincides with that of statues connected with the inception and demise of his rule.

When Vitellius hears of his victory, he immediately holds a public display in order to praise the courage of his soldiers (*vocata contione virtutem militum laudibus cumulat*). His soldiers ask him to honor his freedman Asiaticus with the status of knight, an exhibition of *adulatio* that he refuses, but then changes his mind. At a secret dinner party, he confers the favor: *dein mobilitate ingenii, quod palam abnuerat, inter secreta convivii largitur, honoravitque Asiaticum anulis, foedum mancipium et malis artibus ambitiosum* (“Then with his usual indecision, he bestowed in the secrecy of a banquet what he had openly denied, and honored Asiaticus with rings—a disgraceful slave, dirty-dealing and opportunistic,” 2.57.2). Vitellius’s distinction between a meaningful show (thanks for his men) and a meaningless one (the soldiers’ *adulatio*) falls flat because of his irresolution; his initial refusal of the soldiers’ request seems to be a whim, or possibly an attempt to save appearances, rather than a moral decision. But the evaluation of Asiaticus explains Vitellius’s motivation for secrecy, which would otherwise be inexplicable; since he is in the mood for gratifying his

soldiers, it would make more sense to show them that he is complying with their wishes. Vitellius thinks of himself as a moral agent, hence the distinction between recognizing his soldiers' heroism but denying their request. However, the nature of the victory compromises any such distinction, so that his own secrecy enfolds nothing. Heaping praises on his soldiers (*laudibus cumulat*) and honoring Asiaticus with rings (*honoravitque . . . anulis*) come to the same thing.

Vitellius next hears about the murder of another impersonator, Lucceius Albinus, who had been the governor of Mauretania. Upon Galba's death, he had backed Otho but looked as if he might invade Spain with a considerable force. It was also rumored, Tacitus says, that Albinus had assumed the monarchy along with the title "Iuba": *spargebatur insuper, spreto procuratoris vocabulo Albinum insigne regis et Iubae nomen usurpare* (2.58.2). Eventually, however, his men turn against him, and both he and his wife are assassinated. Although Albinus's military maneuvers and pretensions to royalty represent a threat to Otho's successor, Vitellius displays a curious lack of interest in his death: *nihil eorum quae fierent Vitellio antequirente: brevi auditu [vi] quamvis magna transibat, impar curis gravioribus* ("Vitellius made no inquiry about what happened: however serious the events, he passed over them with a brief hearing, unequal to weightier concerns," 2.59.1). Tacitus mentions Vitellius's reaction in the global context of his relationship with the whole empire, which culminates at 2.61 with the very serious attention he pays to a Gaul named Mariccus, who musters a revolt by pretending to be a god. Asiaticus, "Iuba", Mariccus, and Geta represent in various ways the encroachment of the simulacrum upon all corners of the Empire.

Vitellius himself becomes an imposter on the course of his journey:

Exercitum itinere terrestri pergere iubet: ipse Arare flumine devehitur, nullo principali paratu, sed vetere egestate conspicuus, donec Iunius Blaesus Lugdunensis Galliae rector, genere inlustri, largus animo et par opibus, circumdaret principi ministeria, comitaretur liberaliter, eo ipso ingratus, quamvis odium Vitellius vernilibus blanditiis velaret. (2.59.2)

He ordered the army to proceed on land: he himself was conveyed on the river Arar, with none of the trappings of a princeps, but conspicuous in the poverty of his past, until Junius Blaesus, the governor of Galliae Lugdunensis, who was from a distinguished family, and whose generous spirit was matched by his wealth, put round him a retinue fit for a princeps and attended him courteously. Blaesus was annoying [to Vitellius] by virtue of precisely this assistance, although Vitellius veiled his hatred with slavish compliments.⁴⁰

In the person of Vitellius, Tacitus divides the actual power of the princeps from the trappings that symbolize it, further emphasizing the problem with the wealth and generosity of Blaesus. Blaesus apparently has no designs on the principate, while his behavior indicates that he recognizes Vitellius as the new leader; but the source of Vitellius's hatred is his fear (indicated in the "slavish compliments" with which he hides his feelings) that Blaesus has more symbolic capital than he does. Since he was not present at the battle and has none of the *auctoritas* that could claim his soldiers' victory for himself, Vitellius does not yet fully occupy his position and is right to fear Blaesus's well-intentioned display of his own resources. Blaesus, for his part, does not understand that of all the gestures he could make toward the new princeps, generosity most compromises his own safety. Yet Vitellius needs Blaesus to fortify the facade of power (Blaesus "puts round" him the proper accoutrements), without which he exists only as a lack (the "poverty of his past"); in addition, when Vitellius creates his own facade (*velaret*), it is that of a slave, not a master.

At Lyons, the next stop on his journey, Vitellius holds another display of public thanks for Caecina and Valens, whom he "positions around his chair" (*curuli suae circumposuit*, 2.59.3). He then orders the soldiers to march forward and meet his baby son, who has been wrapped (*opertum*) in a military cloak. He calls the child "Germanicus" and "surrounds him with all the insignia of imperial fortune" (*Germanicum appellavit cinxitque cunctis fortunae principalis insignibus*). Appropriating Blaesus's gesture, Vitellius encloses himself and his son with the effects of power; but these all portend destruction. Caecina and Valens prove no help, and, in the former's case, no friend to Vitellius in the campaign against Vespasian; the image of the infant son overwhelmed by the size of a military cloak captures the helplessness of a child doomed to represent the hope of a Vitellian dynasty, and therefore doomed also to receive no mercy from the Flavians. The brevity of Tacitus's final remark elides the boy himself, concentrating on the effect of the name: *nimius honos inter secunda rebus adversis in solacium cessit* ("An honor too great amid favorable circumstances became a consolation in bad ones," 2.59.3).

Vitellius had accepted the name "Germanicus" himself at the start of his campaign, though not that of "Caesar" (1.62.2); now he gives it to his son but still refuses "Caesar" and defers "Augustus" (2.62.2). However, he makes a false distinction between the two types of name: though less exalted, "Germanicus" is no less loaded a title than the other two. Vitellius wants to make his power real by associating a name (his) with a deed (a battle involving German armies under his command) and with a dead hero

who also happens to be the grandfather of Nero. Neither he nor the dead hero have much to do with the military events that take place while they are in command: leader of the German armies, his role in the civil war is nevertheless minimal, as was Germanicus's in squashing the revolts. In taking Germanicus's name, then, Vitellius once again turns himself into the fiction of a fiction, a problematic that his mother partly recognizes when she hears of his accession: *et pari probitate mater Vitelliorum Sextilia, antiqui moris: dixisse quin etiam ad primas filii sui epistulas ferebatur, non Germanicum a se, sed Vitellium genitum* ("Sextilia, mother of the Vitellii, displayed honesty equal [to that of the emperor's wife], and old-fashioned character: she was even said to have remarked, when she received her son's first letter, that she had not given birth to a "Germanicus" but a "Vitellius," 2.64.2).

While Sextilia punctures Vitellius's self-inflated balloon, the fact that she is "a woman of old-fashioned character" consists not so much in outspokenness as in her belief that Germanicus provides a solid comparandum. Her message seems to be that Vitellius should not pretend to be what he is not, but she misses the systematization of pretense in which Germanicus too was implicated: his father Drusus was voted the title for exploits in Germany (though no permanent acquisition of territory), which was also to pass to his posterity. The name therefore becomes drained of meaning as it passes into the realm of symbolic honor for the family, and Tacitus calls into question a system that interprets inherited names so literally, particularly when it pertains to the naming of those with power. When "our" Germanicus assumes the name, it is purely honorific; or, to put it differently, ratifying a name for posterity instantly designates it as an uninheritable trait. The same is true of "Augustus" and "Caesar," which detach from their objects as soon as they become titles. Sextilia distinguishes between the Julio-Claudian system, in which the emptiness of a name could be ratified as having meaning, and her son, who, she warns, does not possess such authority. When Caesar rebuffed Antony with the famous statement *non sum rex, sed Caesar*, on the one hand he displayed an appropriate modesty; on the other he substituted his own name for that of *rex*. In her response to Vitellius, Sextilia indicates that he cannot usurp a name that has meaning only within the parameters of its own lineage. It would be more appropriate for Vitellius to call himself "Vitellius" than to endow himself with a name that is doubly empty. For her, then, Germanicus can be "Germanicus" because of the institution that created and sustained him. By contrast, Vitellius can be only who he is.

Because he erroneously supposes that these three names carry an orig-

inal meaning, superstition prevents Vitellius from assuming either of the latter two; whereas “Germanicus” sounds important without courting too much invidious comparison. But everything Vitellius does suggests the emptiness of the name, from surrounding himself with generals who are no good to covering up his heir—the real consolidation of his power—within the symbol of a name (the cloak as “Germanicus”). It is the military cloak that the soldiers must see, since the child is covered up, and the military cloak upon which Vitellius bestows title and honors. Vitellius’s choice of name seems particularly ironic in the Tacitean narrative, since the latter depicts Germanicus as the odd man out in the Julio-Claudian system; he dies because there is no place for him, or perhaps because he does not understand his place in it. Vitellius characteristically damages his authority in the very act of asserting it: *omen/nomen*.

At 3.56, the narrative draws a bold comparison between Vitellius and a bad omen: of all the unfavorable signs that occurred during his speech to assembled troops before the arrival of the Flavians at Rome, Vitellius himself was the worst, as he knew nothing about military strategy and had no effective plan in mind: *sed praecipuum ipse Vitellius ostentum erat, ignarus militiae, improvidus consilii*. Plass describes omens in historiography as pieces of “enacted wit” because they present a “funny” reality; reality in the form of a pun or joke that is “funny” because its syntax is riddling, open to multiple interpretations.⁴¹ By this logic, Vitellius unbeknownst to himself becomes the embodiment of enacted wit, its actor. This role is pivotal for establishing the irony that forms an essential part of the narrative. Vitellius is obvious to everyone but himself as a dangerously ironic figure: a commander who cannot lead and a soldier who cannot fight. At one point (2.73), he even acts as if he were no longer Roman: “Then he himself and his army, as if with no rival, had broken out with savagery, lust, and rapine into foreign ways” (*tum ipse exercitusque, ut nullo aemulo, saevitia libidine raptu in externos mores proruperant*). If irony delineates a place where narrative turns against itself and reflects upon itself, becoming what Hayden White, with reference to historiography, calls “metahistory,”⁴² Vitellius illustrates the core issue of the text: namely, how irony represents the lack of stability within a symbolic order. Tacitus presents this lack as the fundamental problem of the principate. Understood as its embodiment, Vitellius is the most important character in the text, and the one closest to the historian.

When Vitellius finally does accept the title “Caesar” (3.58.3), giving in to “the superstition of the name” (*superstitio nominis*), it is far too late for him to use it to any advantage; he only marks himself as “person soon to be

murdered." At this time, he cheers himself up by calling the enthusiastic crowd by specious names: *ipse aeger animi studiis militum et clamoribus populi arma poscentis refovebatur, dum volgus ignavum et nihil ultra verba ausurum falsa specie exercitum et legiones appellat* ("He himself, though depressed, was cheered at the zeal of the soldiers and clamor of the people demanding arms, while with a false appearance he called the lazy crowd, who were fit to dare nothing except words, 'army' and 'legions,' " 3.58.2). By contrast, knights and freedmen offer him money and help because they now feel genuinely sorry for him, their duty no longer coerced by fear: *ea simulatio officii a metu profecta verterat in favorem; ac plerique haud proinde Vitellium quam casum locumque principatus miserabantur* ("That imitation of duty originating in fear had turned to support, and many scarcely pitied Vitellius as much as the accident and position of the principate"). These people act genuinely only when the underbelly of the principate is exposed; that is, as long as the illusion retains some strength, they must dissimulate. But it is the fear of what they see exposed in the system that elicits their pity, not the real human person of Vitellius himself. Their feelings more closely resemble those of an audience of a tragedy, at least in the sense of being moved not by a single individual but by the fallibility of the institutions of human life represented in him.

The scene recalls the relationship of public to princeps under Nero, as Vitellius also plays upon people's sympathy with expression and voice (*nec deerat ipse voltu voce lacrimis misericordiam elicere*, 3.58.3). *Misericordia* picks up the *miserabantur* of the knights' pity in the previous sentence, emphasizing the theatricality of the situation. However, Vitellius turns the Neronian paradigm of spectacle inside-out. The person of Nero on the stage had shown that "Caesar" was a fiction, but one that coincided with the figure of power. Vitellius, on the other hand, assumes the name of Caesar only now, when he is in dire straits and making other gestures that Tacitus calls "excessive": "lavish with promises, and as is the nature of those who are afraid, excessive. Indeed he also wished to be called 'Caesar,' though he had rejected it previously, because of the magic of the name and because in fear the advice of the wise and the rumor of the masses alike are heard" (*largus promissis et, quae natura trepidantium est, immodicus. quin et Caesarem se dici voluit, aspernatus antea, sed tunc superstitione nominis, et quia in metu consilia prudentium et volgi rumor iuxta audiuntur*, 3.58.3-4). In taking recommendations indiscriminately as to whether to be "Caesar," Vitellius undoes the bond—created by Julius Caesar and inherited by Nero—between the name, the person, and the position: the charm of the name vanishes once people perceive its purely sym-

bolic nature. Vitellius's unsystematic behavior destroys the appearance of inevitability that sustains the coincidental relationship between the name and the power invested in it. Thus unlike a Julio-Claudian, Vitellius cannot hold the gaze of his public, who melt away: *ceterum ut omnia inconsulti impetus coepta initiis valida spatio languescunt, dilabi paulatim senatores equitesque, primo cunctanter et ubi ipse non aderat, mox contemptim et sine discrimine, donec Vitellius pudore inriti conatus quae non dabantur remisit* ("But just as everything initiated on spontaneity and impulse, though strong at the beginning, attenuates over time, the senators and knights gradually slipped away, at first hesitantly and in his absence, then without regard or distinction, until Vitellius, ashamed of the useless attempt, gave up on what was not being offered," 3.58.4). No one here makes the mistake of the young recruit who tries to save Nero from the indignity of the character he is playing, because there is no longer any character. Those initially moved by Vitellius's performance react to the fact that they are looking at "nothing," which, identified as the whole system, frightens, but, as embodied in Vitellius, quickly bores them.

Just before Vitellius refuses the title "Caesar" (2.62.2) comes a narrative sequence in which Tacitus shows that the only distinctions to be made are between different kinds of fakes. Suetonius Paulinus and Licinius Proculus, Othonian leaders who worry about the penalty Vitellius may exact, pretend that they deliberately sabotaged the march toward battle in order to help him. Vitellius "believed in their perfidy and absolved them of good faith" (*et Vitellius credidit de perfidia et fidem absoluit*, 2.60.1). The pair lie that they lied, a maneuver that Tacitus calls necessary under the present circumstances, though not honest, and Vitellius grants them pardon for an act that they neither really accomplished nor that would usually be acceptable even to an enemy. Then he excuses Salvius Otho, brother of the late emperor, on the grounds of his brotherly duty, and laziness (*pietate et ignavia excusatus*). Next, Marius Celsus retains his consulship despite the rumored intrigues of Caecilius Simplex, who apparently was willing either to buy it or assassinate Celsus; Vitellius, however, gives Simplex the consulship at a later date, with no need for bribery or murder (2.60.2).

Vitellius therefore grants clemency in circumstances where good and bad faith coexist in differing patterns: he conjures good faith from the non-crime of Paulinus and Proculus, absolves Salvius Otho for morally contradictory reasons, and gives Simplex a consulship despite the possibility of his machinations. Behind these actions lies no fixed motivation. Each of the pardons bears a superficial connection with the next, but in fact the three

have nothing to do with one another, except for the fact that they sustain a power that is all appearance, with no logic behind it.

In the next chapter (2.61), we meet another imposter:

Inter magnorum virorum discrimina, pudendum dictu, Mariccus quidam, e plebe Boiorum, inserere sese fortunae et provocare arma Romana simulatione numinum ausus est. iamque adsertor Gallicarum et deus (nam id sibi indiderat) concitis octo milibus hominum proximos Aeduorum pagos trahebat, cum gravissima civitas electa iuventute, adiectis a Vitellio cohortibus, fanaticam multitudinem disiecit. captus in eo proelio Mariccus; ac mox feris obiectus quia non laniabatur, stolidum vulgus inviolabilem credebat, donec spectante Vitellio interfectus est.

Among the crises of great men, it is shameful to say, a certain Mariccus, from the lower class of the Boii, dared to introduce himself to fortune and call out Roman arms with the pretense of divinity. This champion of the Gauls and god (for he had endowed himself with this) was plundering the nearest villages of the Aedui after having raised eight thousand men, when the most responsible state, having called up its youth and having been joined by Vitellian cohorts, broke up the frenzied mob. Mariccus was captured in this battle; thereafter, because he was not mauled after being thrown to the beasts, the credulous crowd believed he was untouchable, until he was executed with Vitellius watching.

Mariccus's vocabulary represents a significant threat both to the newly appointed Vitellius and to the whole Roman order, which makes a distinction between the divinity of its emperors and the *simulatio numinum* of anyone else. The distancing effect of the arena encourages this spurious distinction: Vitellius hopes to foster the perception of "us," whose emperor-gods are "real," versus "them," whose champions only playact divinity, with the spectacle of the imposter's very human—that is, "real"—death. But Mariccus is lucky, the beasts leave him alone, and he looks to the people like the genuine article (*inviolabilis*), or true divinity. Now Vitellius appears to have made a big mistake. In putting Mariccus into the arena, he exposes what he should conceal: that is, the process of make-believe that makes men into gods. Killing the outsider only underlines the structural sameness that exists between his divinization and Caesar's: the "real thing" turns out to be fake. He is in the end only a man, but one who called himself *adsertor*: one who determines by formal testimony a person's free or slave status. Why after his death should he be any less *divus* than Caesar?

The anxiety over the provenance of divinity underlies Vitellius's rather

curiously worded question to Geta a few chapters later (“[Geta was asked] who of mortals he was”) because, post-Mariccus, the threat of imposters usurping the prerogatives of emperors seems especially serious. Tacitus underlines this threat when he introduces Mariccus’s claim to be *deus* with the parenthetical comment *nam id sibi indiderat*, “He gave himself the title.” In the next chapter, we find out that Vitellius refuses the titles “Augustus” and “Caesar”—“made-up” names that are clearly synonymous with divinity or special power—as the refusal detracts in no way from his actual power: *cum de potestate nihil detraheret* (2.62.2). In the arena, then, inside and outside merge rather than separate, and Tacitus prepares us for Bedriacum by showing us that spectatorship makes for false distinctions.

In this episode, as at Bedriacum, then, Vitellius makes specious distinctions between two types of dead bodies: “real” and “fake” or “meaningful” and “meaningless.” The dead Mariccus, like the dead bodies at Bedriacum, furnishes an illusion of reality that Vitellius believes is different from the bodies in the ring at the gladiatorial games; but he also believes he makes them real by turning them into a spectacle, by looking at them. He does not realize, in the case of Mariccus, that by showing the reality (mortality) behind the imposture he also shows the imposture that fronts the whole imperial system. Tacitus makes his own specious distinctions in both cases: he calls the sight of Bedriacum *foedum atque atrox*, as if this were somehow different from that of the games at Cremona; and he compares the Mariccus affair with “crises of great men,” as if there were a difference between Mariccus’s self-presentation and that of the characters in the preceding chapters. *Pudendum dictu* corresponds here to *foedum atque atrox* as an emphatically moral statement by the narrator, whose irony provides the distance necessary to see what the characters—particularly Vitellius—cannot.

There is another, more significant reason for *pudendum dictu*, which is a very rare phrase in Latin literature. With it, Tacitus says: “We should not talk about this part,” thereby putting it under a sort of erasure. Imagining that we do skip it, what immediately follows Mariccus’s death is a description of Vitellius’s insatiable appetite. All corners of the Empire are looted to provide for his banquets: *epularum foeda et inexplebilis libido: ex urbe atque Italia inritamenta gulae gestabantur strepentibus ab utroque mari itineribus; exhausti conviviorum adparatibus principes civitatum; vastabantur ipsae civitates* (“He had a disgusting and insatiable lust for banquetting: the fancies of his belly were brought from the city and from Italy, while the routes from both seas were loud with traffic; the leading men of various cities were worn out by preparing feasts; the states themselves were laid waste,” 2.62.2). Vitellius’s appetite is literally devastating: it empties out and

exhausts the resources of what- or whoever tries to supply it.⁴³ Tacitus juxtaposes this phenomenal appetite with the gaze that precedes it, but makes of the two chapters two distinct units that cannot be joined, because one is bracketed by *pudendum dictu*. Why should Mariccus be shameful to talk about, but not Vitellius's disgusting appetite? Mariccus provides one key element without which the shocking excess of the emperor cannot be fully appreciated: the empty eye. Tacitus waits until the scene at Bedriacum—ten chapters later—to put these two elements together. Eye and belly become one entity that feasts itself on the sight of nothing; that is, on the sham that Vitellius instantly makes of anything he looks at. Now, shame can no longer be invoked to cover the appalling combination.

SIMULACRAL ENTRIES . . . AND EXITS

When Vitellius approaches Rome, Tacitus again stresses the Neronian quality of his entourage, which includes “buffoons, actors, and charioteers” (2.87.2). Together they progress slowly, laying waste the countryside with the demand for food: *nec coloniae modo aut municipia congestu copiarum, sed ipsi cultores arvaeque maturis iam frugibus ut hostile solum vastabantur* (“Not only the towns or villages were devastated by the gathering-together of supplies, but the farmers and fields with ripe harvests too, like enemy soil”). These phrases echo the description of the battlefield at Bedriacum, where the ground was “infected,” and there was “terrible devastation to the flattened trees and crops” (*infecta tabo humus, protritis arboribus ac frugibus dira vastitas*, 2.70.1). At Bedriacum, Tacitus highlighted the false distinction that Vitellius makes between the “fake” death of the arena and the “real” death of the battlefield; here, Vitellius no longer stops to determine the relationship of his own world of actors, entertainers, and other pretenders to any other reality. The devastation of the real countryside only feeds the illusion, which swallows it up whole.

Seven miles from the city, the troops halt in order for Vitellius to issue rations, as if, Tacitus remarks, “he were fattening up gladiators” (*singulis ibi militibus Vitellius paratos cibos ut gladiatoriam saginam dividebat*, 2.88.1). *Sagina* was one of the vices for which Vitellius had been “bought and sold” in Nero’s reign (2.71.1), and which he now passes on to his soldiers. Vitellius here erases the (false) line between soldiers and gladiators that he wished to draw at Bedriacum, making entertainers of them through the stimulation of their appetites. The soldiers’ role as political makers recedes in Vitellius’s empty world to the point that they become “fake” versions of

themselves, arena- instead of empire-fighters; at the same time, Vitellius characteristically shores up the emptiness by appealing to a desire that is theoretically satiable. A tragedy quickly ensues: the populace pours out of the city and into the camp, mixing with the soldiers, and a few jokers tease the soldiers by cutting off their belts and asking where their equipment is (*abscisis furtim balteis an accincti forent rogitanes*)—a ribald joke, or at the least a turn of events that creates an atmosphere of carnival. The soldiers become angry and attack the civilians: *non tulit ludibrium insolens contumeliarum animus* (“Their temper, unaccustomed to insult, did not endure this joking,” 2.88.2), at which point a man gets killed who turns out to be the father of one of the soldiers. The soldiers do not like the crowd interaction that the role of entertainer entails—gladiators must put up with whatever the crowd demands—and try to assert their “real” role in this deadly fashion, but the reaction to the death lasts for one sentence before they rush into Rome to see the spot where Galba was killed:

caesus inter alios pater militis, cum filium comitaretur; deinde agnitus, et volgata caede temperatum ab innoxiiis. in urbe tamen trepidatum praecurrentibus passim militibus; forum maxime petebant cupidine visendi locum, in quo Galba iacuisset. nec minus saevum spectaculum erant ipsi, tergis ferarum et ingentibus telis horrentes, cum turbam populi per incitiam parum vitarent aut, ubi lubrico viae vel occursu alicuius procidissent, ad iurgium, mox ad manus et ferrum transirent. (2.88.2–3)

Among others, the father of one of the soldiers was killed as he was visiting his son; when he had been recognized and news of the murder spread, they backed off of the innocent civilians. Nevertheless, in the city people were afraid as the soldiers indiscriminately surged forward; they especially sought out the forum with the desire to see the place in which Galba had fallen. They themselves presented no less a savage spectacle, bristling with the hides of wild beasts and with huge weapons. Because of their boorishness, they scarcely avoided the crowds; or, when they did fall down because the road was slippery or they ran into someone, they resorted to quarreling, and thereafter to fists and swords.

There is no truth in the soldiers’ representation of themselves as “real,” just as there is no “real” world to which they could belong. Their immediate desire to gaze at the place of Galba’s murder—that is, an empty place—marks them as Vitellius’s creatures, and the juxtaposition of this gaze with their murderous insistence that they are soldiers, not gladiators, recreates the dynamic of Vitellius at the games and at Bedriacum: a false distinction between real and false. Tacitus represents these two mutually exclusive ob-

jects through the internal focalization of the soldiers, but also represents their external appearance with external focalization: within and without they sustain the world of the simulacrum.

The topos of a dead relative here echoes an incident that occurs after the second battle at Cremona: a young man, left at home in Spain by his father and now serving in a different legion, happens to wound his father mortally in the battle. As he embraces the dying man, praying that his father's spirit will not be angered at the act of parricide, the narrative switches to indirect discourse: *voce flebili precabatur placatos patris manes, neve se ut parricidam aversarentur: publicum id facinus; et unum militem quotam civilium armorum partem?* ("In a tearful voice he prayed that his father's shade be appeased, so that they would not reject him as a parricide: this crime had not been public, and how small a part of the whole civil war was one soldier? 3.25.2). The reported speech becomes increasingly dramatic as the youth makes his plea, while turning the singular nature of the deed into part of the whole scenario of civil war, becoming a speech-act that dramatizes and renews the discourse of civil war in which it participates. A breakdown in signification obtains between the activity of the youth (killing his father) and the passivity with which the dramatization of the act invests it; a kind of sorcery that whisks the reality-value, or the referentiality, of the act into thin air and leaves only the spectacle of the act, divested of particularity or meaning.

In an operational system of signification, parricide is an act that carries certain consequences, both religious and civil, which give it a reality-value. What we see in this scenario, however, is the youth demanding that this system be absent, nonfunctional, while the narrative contributes to the conception of the failure of signification by making a spectacle of the incident through speech. From spectacle to simulacrum: a *production* of the event. The narrative then moves from the young man's participation in the production to the whole regiment's: "Throughout the lines ran a current of wonder and complaint, and men cursed this cruelest of all wars. However, this did not hinder them from killing and robbing relatives, kinsmen, and brothers: they said to each other that a crime had been done, and they did it themselves" (3.25.3). Within the production of the war, whose script includes "this cruelest of all wars," opposites have so collapsed into one another that complete hypocrisy is the order of the day. Saying one thing and doing its exact opposite are no longer antithetical concepts, and therefore neither can have any claim to signify.

The collapse of opposites presents itself as a particularly apt paradigm for an era marked by battles in which the opposing sides were of the same

nationality. After the battle at Bedriacum, the Othonians and Vitellians collapse into one mass of mourners, while the narrative again reinforces the script of the civil war: "Then vanquished and victors alike burst into tears, cursing with melancholy delight the civil war to which fate had doomed them. They shared tents and nursed their wounded brothers or relatives. Hopes and rewards seemed problematic, but death and bereavement were sure. Nor was anyone so inured to evils that he did not mourn some death" (2.45.3). The oxymoron "melancholy delight" (*misera laetitia*) captures both the theatricality of the emotion and the nonsense that the produced, simulated, spectacular nature of the time engenders.

The display in Rome of the Vitellian soldiers' strangeness pales in comparison to the sight presented by Vitellius himself, who reaches the Milvian Bridge in full *generalissimo* regalia, driving the Senate and people in front of him as if they were a vanquished people (2.89). His entourage dissuades him from actually entering Rome "as if it were a captured city," however, and he dons instead the *praetexta*, a pun on its cognate *praetextum* ("pretense"). Either he genuinely does not realize that his first outfit is unacceptable, in which case he feels that he *is* entering a captured city and has every right to wear his splendid get-up and treat senators and civilians like prisoners of war, and the *praetexta* is a pretext to render himself initially more accepted by the city; or he does realize that the first outfit is not right, in which case both outfits are disguises. Tacitus calls the whole parade a *decora facies et non Vitellio principe dignus exercitus* ("a splendid sight, a worthy army, though not with Vitellius as the princeps," 2.89.2), again emphasizing seeming rather than being. But the punch line removes Vitellius even from the seeming; he is beyond the pale of the usual spectacles and pretenses.

Vitellius's next move is to dub his mother "Augusta," a title, a *decora facies*, that sits particularly badly on a matron of the old school who has already announced her distaste for, and unwillingness to participate in, the spectacle of power that has so intoxicated her son (2.64.2). Vitellius then gives "a boastful speech about himself as if he were addressing the Senate and people of a foreign state" in which he glorifies his own hard work and self-control. The narrative contrasts the speech with a split in the reactions of the audience, some of whom are all too aware of his disgraceful and deleterious march through Italy, as was the rest of the country who had suffered from it. But the *volgus*, "without discriminating between counterfeit and true" (*sine falsi verique discrimine*, 2.90.2), raises the usual clamor of insincere acclamation, and insists that Vitellius accept the title of "Augustus," which he had previously rejected. That his "acceptance was as point-

less as the refusal" (*tam frustra quam recusaverat*) underlines the vacuity of the magic name, at least as applied to himself; while Tacitus hints that although there are those who understand the very real effects of Vitellius's actions, their response is drowned out by the masses, who prevail despite their lack of concern for the larger picture.

Vitellius continues his regime in this vein as he carries out consular elections "in the presence of the candidates like an ordinary person" (*sed comitia consulum cum candidatis civiliter celebrans*, 2.91.2), an act that the narrative identifies as a show by linking it with his appearance at the theater as a *spectator* and at the racecourse as a *fautor*. These gestures, traditionally the means for the emperor to appear *civilis*, are designed to win him favor, as is the gesture of carrying on the consular elections properly. And these gestures might really have been "welcome and democratic" (*grata sane et popularia*), but for the unpleasant and degrading memory of his former actions. These gestures are an act even at the best of times, a way for the emperor to be one of the crowd, but the illusion requires a stable symbolic order, not one in which the emperor is at any moment likely to forget who he is. Such is Vitellius's behavior when the Flavians offer the possibility of surrender and safety, causing him to think only of how many servants he might be allowed and to what resort he might retire: *tanta torpedo invaserat animum, ut, si principem eum fuisse ceteri non meminissent, ipse oblivisceretur* ("Such sluggishness had invaded his spirit that if his entourage had not remembered he was princeps, he would have forgotten it himself," 3.63.2). This *sententia* is funny for the same reason as the following: *ipse neque iubendi neque vetandi potens non iam imperator, sed tantum belli causa erat* ("Able neither to command nor forbid, he himself was no longer emperor but only the cause of the war," 3.70.4). Both cancel Vitellius out, capturing in language the annihilating and self-annihilating qualities that he displays in the narrative.

In representing his death, Tacitus is kinder to Vitellius, who appears genuinely unaware of his many mistakes. Rather than endanger his family and supporters, he opts to abdicate, and the scene represents an inversion of the first military parade following his victory (2.59). There, Junius Blaesus surrounded him with the outfit of power, a gesture that he then sought to appropriate; here, his grieving household surrounds him (*Palatio degreditur maesta circum familia*, 3.67.2). At the parade, he had his baby son brought out, enveloped in a military cloak; for his abdication, his son is carried in a little litter as if in a funeral procession (*ferebatur lecticula parvulus filius velut in funebrem pompam*). The event grows more dramatic as the populace pities Vitellius, finding his situation worse than the ends of

many other emperors, and Vitellius shows his son to them, weeps, and tries to hand over his dagger in a symbolic gesture to Caecilius Simplex, the consul who had been willing to buy the honor or kill Marius Celsus for it (2.60). But Simplex will not take it. Attempting to reach the temple of Concord to give up his insignia and then reach his brother's house, Vitellius finds his way blocked at every turn. Eventually he gives up and returns to the palace.

Later, as hostilities mount between the Flavians led by Flavius Sabinus and the Vitellians, Sabinus accuses Vitellius of putting on an empty show instead of genuinely abdicating, citing as evidence his attempt to reach his brother's house, which was close to the Forum and visible: *simulationem prorsus et imaginem deponendi imperii fuisse ad decipiendos tot inlustres viros. cur enim e rostris fratris domum, imminentem foro et inritandis hominum oculis, quam Aventinum et penates uxoris petisset?* ("[Sabinus said that] it had been a fake and indeed an appearance of abdicating, in order to deceive a lot of worthy men. Why, otherwise, had he from the Rostra sought his brother's house, which dominated the Forum, a goad to men's eyes, rather than the Aventine and the *penates* of his wife?" 3.70.1). Vitellius, upset, denies the charge, casting the blame on the soldiers for their impetuosity; but the irony is that Sabinus is right. This is a metahistorical moment: Vitellius's behavior is by its very nature an empty show, his character a cipher.

The narrative eternally consigns Vitellius to a world of simulations, from which he never breaks free and which he does not understand. Though the last sight he sees before his death is that of his own statues being torn down (3.85), Vitellius cannot comprehend the metaphor: that his whole rule was a rule of illusion in which, under his own terms, he only played an emperor.⁴⁴ Tearing down the statues suggests that somewhere there is something that is not a simulation, that the image can be ripped away and the illusion shattered, but once again the event becomes the object of a gaze, a spectacle whose spectator misses the point and is turned once again into the actor, the simulation, who represents himself as real. Vitellius's final attempt to carve out a place in reality for himself emphasizes both his own delusions and the destruction that they have brought on his people, a destruction grimly depicted two chapters earlier in the struggle inside Rome between the Vitellians and Flavians. The people of Rome become a *spectator populus* ("spectator-people"), who cheer the fighters "as if at a fake battle" (*utque in ludicro certamine*, 3.83.1). When one side loses ground, the men seek cover in shops and houses, only to be dragged out and killed "at the demand of the mob," like cowardly gladiators. The

city has become a theater in which the spectacle of civil war and death is played out, presenting a “savage and deformed aspect throughout the whole city” (*saeva ac deformis urbe tota facies*)—the reverse, refracted image of the *decora facies* that masked Vitellius’s entry into Rome at 2.89.

The civil war alienates the civic body from itself as it collapses the distinction between the military and civil arenas. The people watch, but they cannot identify with the action because to do so would make them guilty of a desire to kill their fellow citizen. Instead, the battle becomes an arena from outside which the noncombatants project their own guilt onto the soldiers. The self-alienated eye now sees the battle as a gladiatorial game, in which its own guilt is punished with the punishment of the cowardly gladiator/soldier. This kind of gaze becomes all-important as the mechanism for maintaining a fiction of self that the civil war would otherwise undermine, but the fact they cannot watch and identify at the same time means that the people understand nothing from the experience. Their reaction to this battle instantiates what Tacitus often describes as the alienation of the people from their political condition. It seems to be the necessary condition, as well as the result, of the Empire that the people be *incuriosi* or act out of *inscitia rei publicae ut alienae* (“ignorance of the Republic as if it were another’s/as it was not theirs,” 1.1.1), and the people’s indifference to internecine war illustrates their perception of the Empire as something beyond themselves that takes care of itself and in which their participation is neither required nor desirable.

Like the intermingling of the images of bloodshed and restaurants, the image of heaps of corpses is juxtaposed with that of prostitutes. The prostitutes in turn represent “however much vice there was in luxurious idleness,” which is set against “whatever crimes there were in the bitterest captivity” (*quantum in luxurioso otio libidinum, quidquid in acerbissima captivitate scelerum*), so that “you would believe that the same citizenry committed both violence and debauchery” (*prorsus ut eandem civitatem et furere crederes et lascivire*, 3.83.2). The progression of association runs from the bloodshed and corpses (the sack of the city) to the prostitutes and back to the sack of the city (*acerbissima captivitate*). The prostitutes may, on the one hand, act as a symbol of the moral degeneration that Tacitus sees as having spawned such chaos. On the other, they possess a metonymic relationship with the narrative of interpenetration in which they appear. The body of a prostitute bears the same marks of usage as those to which the city of Rome is subjected at this point,⁴⁵ while Tacitus extends the image of the prostitute to the desire that the citizens feel to watch the destruction of their own city. The desire for self-destruction is

like the desire for self-punishment: it is mediated through the gaze that divides the self and makes one part guilty.

Tacitus illustrates this division of self with the phrase *inhumana securitas*, which he uses to differentiate the people's reaction to civil war in 69 from that of the people under Sulla and Cinna: *nec tunc minus crudelitatis: nunc inhumana securitas et ne minimo quidem temporis voluptates intermissae* ("There had been no less cruelty then, but now there was an indifference to one's own humanity, and pleasure was not interrupted even for a moment," 3.83.3). Civil war between Sulla and Cinna was not viewed as a spectacle, nor did it have anything to do with pleasure. By 69, however, the perspective of the spectators makes them indifferent to the fact of anarchy and heedless of their own danger. Deaths occur in the arena, but the audience is safe in its seats.⁴⁶ The sack of Rome epitomizes the result of the alienation produced by the political structure of the Empire, which mirrors that of a tragedy without a catharsis: the people are compelled to become spectators, but of something real, not imitated. By 4.1, the slaughter has become indiscriminate as the Flavian forces kill soldiers and citizens alike, storming houses under the pretense of rooting out Vitellians (*Vitellianos occultari simulantes*), but actually looking for loot. Previously, it was the *spectator populus* who turned the battle into a spectacle and divorced themselves from it; now, the soldiers for their part represent the Vitellians to themselves not only as enemies, but as pretexts for criminal behavior. The fiction is carried on at a double remove.

In the case of both emperors and both mobs, sustaining the drama depends upon their respective abilities to sustain their roles, and each in sustaining its own role to establish the identity of the other. Vitellius plays his role unawares, and his idleness and stupidity, the main characteristics ascribed to him, disable any possibility for canny maneuvering within the system of the simulacrum. Presented with the imminent Flavian coup, when the situation calls for him to create a different persona, he can only reprise the same role over again (3.54–56). Continuing to lead a life of dissipation, lavishing treaty statuses and Latin rights on provincials and foreigners, he still commands the attention of the crowds, which gapes at his generosity (*sed volgus ad magnitudinem beneficiorum hiabat*). When the facts intrude, in the form of news about the defeat of his forces at Cremona, he directs the greatest effort at hushing up the rumors and executing his own spies for fear they will disseminate information about his losing status. By contrast, the narrative reports an incident with the centurion Julius Agrestis (3.54.2–3), who, accompanied by Antonius Primus himself, inspects the enemy's strength and the damage done at Cremona. Upon Vitellius's refusal to admit

the truth of his report, Agrestis commits suicide to prove his honesty, or, according to some sources, is executed by Vitellius: "But all tell the same story of his fidelity and unwavering resolution." In other words, regardless of which version of the story is true, Agrestis suffers from attempting to force a different scenario upon Vitellius, although Tacitus's preferred version is that Agrestis gave a speech ("Since you need overwhelming proof and have no further use for me whether alive or dead, I will supply you with evidence you must believe") and then committed suicide.

This version emphasizes how high the stakes are in trying to establish some version of reality that exists to be seen and comprehended in some way other than is achieved with the fickle and shifting gaze, which turns all to spectacle. Agrestis openly declares his mission to Primus (*nec exploratione occulta fallere Antonium temptavit, sed mandata imperatoris suumque animum professus*) and sees the evidence of the Flavian victory. But the information gleaned from such seeing is not accorded any value. The only medium available to Agrestis to convey his frustrated vision is his own dead body, which he seems to think must prove the truth or reality-value of his claims about what he has witnessed; and in fact we hear at the beginning of the next chapter (3.55) that "Vitellius was like a sleeper awakened" (*Vitellius ut e somno excitus*). This analogy appears to imply that Vitellius is ready to cast off the role of the affable, pleasure-loving Nero substitute and get something done, and is followed with a short list of the military dispatches that Vitellius sends in order to reinforce key areas. But his own behavior belies such a promise. His attempt to cement his old role continues as he appoints consuls for years in advance, as if he will survive that long, and confers treaties, rights, and tribute exemptions, as if worrying about such concerns should take precedence over the immediate danger presented by Vespasian. Finally, he does take up his position as a leader of the army, joining up with his troops at Mevania, but has no idea how to behave or what orders to give, and returns shortly to Rome (3.56.2).⁴⁷ Vitellius's response in the time of crisis, to try to cement or ratify the role he has been playing, shows his incomprehension of the rules of the spectacular game. The game dictates that there can be no fixed roles when the actors and the audience can switch places; the usurper is soon to be usurped; the avenger killed and then himself avenged.⁴⁸ When Vitellius refuses to metamorphose his role according to the dictates of circumstance, the crowd eventually changes it for him, ripping down his statues (the equivalents of the mask, or the inflexible role) and recasting him as the usurper, the criminal, and, to a certain extent, as the scapegoat.⁴⁹

4 Vespasian

The Emperor Who Succeeded

At *Annals* 1.7, Tacitus lists the order of those who swore allegiance to Tiberius upon his succession: *Sex. Pompeius et Sex. Appuleius consules primi in verba Tiberii Caesaris iuravere, apudque eos Seius Strabo et C. Turranus, ille praetoriarum cohortium praefectus, hic annonae; mox senatus milesque et populus* ("Sex. Pompeius and Sex. Appuleius the consuls swore allegiance to Tiberius Caesar first; with them were Seius Strabo and C. Turranus, the prefects of the praetorian guard and grain supply, respectively; then the Senate, army, and people"). The division of *senatus* and *populus* by *miles* is more than a chance remark in the service of narrative detail. At the beginning of his reign, Tiberius faces the insurrection of the Pannonian legions and their offer of *imperium* to Germanicus. In the *Histories*, however, Tacitus describes this *arcanum imperii*—the power of the army to make a princeps, as well as the death of the Senate as a functional unit of government—as the revelation of 68–69 in the civil war instigated by Verginius and concluded by Galba. The *Annals*, therefore, published after the *Histories* but depicting earlier events, takes what was narratively manifest in the earlier text and makes it syntactically latent. We expect *senatus populusque*, the traditional republican formulation, but Tacitus divides them from one another with *miles* in order to emphasize three distinct groups, each of which functions very differently than during the Republic.¹

These functions are specified in the *Histories*: the Senate, utterly degraded; the people, a powerful reflection of the princeps; and the army, hostile to the Senate on the one hand and similar in many respects to the people on the other. In the old days of the Republic, the army served the state and Senate, and the people were a body whose nominal voting rights the rich and powerful could manipulate to their advantage. Augustus preserved the republican institutions, but the rich and powerful were now

subordinate to him.² The back of the Senate was broken, though its aura had to be preserved. According to Plass, Tacitus's account of Tiberius's relationship with the Senate demonstrates how the emperor's initial reluctance to assume absolute power depended upon the Senate's ability to assert itself as his partner.³ Failing miserably to do so, the Senate thrusts the rule upon Tiberius in such a way as to make him dependent upon them for the existence and justification of his position, at the same time as gaining mastery over them.

Tacitus reports Tiberius's disgust with this display of spinelessness (*Ann.* 3.65.3), which contributes as much to a philosophical as a political dilemma. To probe this, Plass invokes the classic Groucho Marx joke "I'd never belong to any club that would have me as a member" as an expression of the paradox of self-definition: like the master in Hegel's master/slave dialectic, "I" define myself through the recognition of a group that degrades itself by recognizing me. Tiberius experiences a similar problem: "If another is [politically] conscious of me as a self but not of himself as the same, is my [political] selfhood authentic?"⁴ In the *Annals*, the Senate's power derives from its abnegation of power: in making itself weak it drags Tiberius down with it. At the same time, Tacitus also suggests the new heights of political significance that now belong to the army and the people, as military power and subscription to the fledgling ideology of *imperium* as the *dream* of Republic, embodied in institutions like the Senate, sustain *imperium*. In the *Histories*, Tacitus shows how the status of the princeps's authenticity undergoes radical change with the military accession of Vespasian, because he is released from this dialectical relationship with the Senate.

In the *Histories*, Tacitus anticipates the subtlety of the *Annals* with open identification of the characteristics that in the later text remain appropriately veiled, like the character of Tiberius himself. The relationship between the two texts in this respect resembles that of the two parts of *Don Quixote*: in the first, the protagonist undergoes various experiences that in the second become the object of others' reflection. Don Quixote becomes a second-degree character whose life and adventures are held up to view; when he finally regains his sanity, it is because he sees his own reflection in the shards of mirror on the suit of the Knight of Mirrors. The *Histories* is to the *Annals* as the "big letters" are to the small ones in Socrates' preliminary examination of justice:

εἶπον οὖν ὅπερ ἐμοὶ ἔδοξεν, ὅτι τὸ ζήτημα ᾧ ἐπιχειροῦμεν οὐ φαῦλον
ἀλλ' ὁξὺ βλέποντος, ὡς ἐμοὶ φαίνεται. ἐπειδὴ οὖν ἡμεῖς οὐ δεινοί,
δοκῶ μοι, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, τοιαύτην ποιήσασθαι ζήτησιν αὐτοῦ, οἷαν περ ἂν εἰ

προσέταξέ τις γράμματα σμικρὰ πόρρωθὲν ἀναγνῶναι μὴ παντὶ ὁζὺ
 βλέπουσιν, ἔπειτά τις ἐνενόησεν, ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ γράμματα ἔστι που καὶ
 ἄλλοθι μείζω τε καὶ ἐν μείζονι, ἔρμαιον ἂν ἐφάνη οἶμαι ἐκεῖνα
 πρῶτον ἀναγνόντας οὕτως ἐπισκοπεῖν τὰ ἐλάττω, εἰ τὰ αὐτὰ ὄντα τυγ-
 χάνει. (*Rep.* 368c)

And so I said what seemed to me to be the case: the inquiry at hand appears to me to be not simple, but one appropriate for someone who sees keenly. Therefore, since we aren't very clever, I said, I think we should make such an inquiry as we would if someone ordered us, who don't see well, to read small letters from a distance, and there-upon someone else recognized that these same letters existed elsewhere, larger, and on a larger surface. I think it would seem a piece of luck for us to read those letters first, and then similarly read the smaller ones, to see whether they are really the same.

Socrates uses this analogy to begin his examination of justice, in response to Glaucon's and Adeimantus's appeal for an argument that shows justice as the greatest good. On the one hand, this passage seems to represent a fallacy in Socrates' reasoning, as justice in a city is not necessarily the same as in an individual; that is to say, large letters may spell a different kind of justice than small.⁵ Socrates himself calls attention to the dissymmetry by specifying that the larger letters are "on a larger surface," whereas the smaller have no specific location.⁶ He therefore implies that what is recognizable in large letters that have a specific location might not be in small ones, even if the two share some of the same characteristics. Tacitus's phrase *senatus milesque et populus* in the *Annals* might represent "smaller letters," since the juxtaposition of elements is significant but not immediately comprehensible in the larger scheme of imperial history with which Tacitus is working. In the *Histories*, however, he lays out the same elements in far bolder relief, showing the importance of *miles* that the *Annals* only hinted at.

The difference between the "larger letters" of the *Histories* and the "smaller letters" of the *Annals* inheres in the fact that larger letters allow themselves to be read distinctly; they spell out a whole and recognizable word, such as JUST (in Socrates' *logos*) or EMPIRE (in Tacitus's), that is distinguishable in smaller letters only in its particulars: JST or MPR. Larger and smaller letters share important elements, but the parts that are lacking among the smaller make the relationship between the two ambiguous. The *Histories* spells EMPIRE, as surely as it does MILES as an important subcategory. The narrative ranges over practically all of Roman conquered territory, starting with the summary of affairs in the provinces at 1.2 and including the major revolt of the Batavians (4.12–36; 54–79;

5.14–?) and smaller ones in Britain, Dacia, and Pontus (3.44–47). The nature of the civil wars demands the movement of troops from all over the map, and Tacitus often describes other minor action in the provinces, such as the murder of Lucius Piso, senatorial governor of Africa (4.48–50); and the false Nero in Achaia (2.8–9). In his first historical text, then, Tacitus depicts Roman *imperium* starkly with a portrait of its near demise, and spells out the elements as they become clear through the possibility of negation. The *Annals*, by contrast, spells MPR, signifying not EMPIRE but EMPEROR. The connection between the two is unmistakable, yet the ambiguity of the *Annals* lies in the degree to which the one is identified with the other. The subtlety of Tacitus's final text is that it will never let on. In this way, any reading of Tacitean historiography will have to shuttle back and forth between the two texts (leaving aside the implications of this theory for the *opera minora*), and at the same time cannot use the one to "corroborate" the other. Each implies the other, but neither is the truth of the other. MPR might also be expressed as MPR and mislead the reader as to the nature of its connection with EMPIRE.⁷

Paradigmatic of this problem is the narrator's interjection *hercule* at *Annals* 1.3. In this chapter, Tacitus describes the various people Augustus seeks to groom for succession. First, he mentions the exile of Agrippa Postumus to Planasia; then, of Germanicus, he says: *at hercule Germanicum Druso ortum octo apud Rhenum legionibus inposuit adscirique per adoptionem a Tiberio iussit* ("But by god, he put Germanicus son of Drusus at the head of eight legions on the Rhine and ordered that he be adopted by Tiberius"). This notable interjection has been interpreted by Koestermann and Furneaux as expressing surprise and delight at Augustus's flouting of Livia's influence; Miller suggests that it is "strongly adversative—Postumus he drove into exile, but *Germanicus* he honoured."⁸ Both of these interpretations connect *hercule* with a previous thought as if to emphasize it, but disagree as to which it should go with. However, *hercule* seems too strong an expression merely to emphasize the different treatments of the Germanicus and Agrippa: is it really so striking that Augustus was capable of this sort of injustice? Also, *hercule* does not stress that by putting him in charge of the legions Augustus necessarily preferred Germanicus to Tiberius and was therefore foiling Livia's plot; he had, after all, formally adopted Tiberius, made him a *collega imperii* and *consors tribuniciae potestatis*, and recognized him in front of the army. All these gestures had been *palam hortatu* ("by [Livia's] open request"), no longer *artibus matris* ("by the machinations of a mother"). In the narrative sequence of these potential heirs, Agrippa separates Tiberius from Germanicus, but Tacitus

also remarks that Augustus wanted Tiberius to adopt Germanicus so that he could fortify his family for posterity (*quo pluribus munimentis insisteret*). It therefore seems plausible that *hercule* looks forward, not back, connecting Germanicus neither with Agrippa, nor with Tiberius for the sake of illustrating Augustus's independence, but with Tiberius in order to establish the significance of their relationship for the narrative.

This relationship informs the whole Tiberian narrative, as the German legions in revolt offer Germanicus *imperium* (1.35). The beginning of the *Annals* thus presents a princeps at Rome, working through civil difficulties presented by his association with the Senate; and a charismatic commander with the opportunity to seize power through military support. But Germanicus shies away from it, shielding the *arcanum imperii* with a melodramatic pretense of suicide, and no one else in the *Annals* is offered *imperium* in this way. The full realization of military dictatorship comes with the accession of Vespasian, the duration of whose reign is counted from the day he is acclaimed by the soldiers in Alexandria on 1 July 69 (*Hist.* 2.79). Galba had refused to allow the acclamation of the army to supplant that of the Senate, while Otho and Vitellius had warring claims to ultimate power and survived their separate accessions only for a short time. They therefore had a secure acclamation from neither the Senate nor the army.

Tacitus attributes Vespasian's triumph more to a happy coincidence of circumstances than to an outstanding character. He allows that of all the previous emperors, Vespasian was the only one who changed for the better (1.50), and speaks well of his soldierly abilities while simultaneously mentioning his stinginess (2.5). However, the latter trait, reminiscent of Galba, does not bode well. Tacitus also remarks upon the fact that to pay for munitions, Vespasian imposes a heavy financial burden, sustained by *delationes*, upon the wealthy; it is a practice that does not cease with the war: *ipso Vespasiano inter initia imperii ad obtinendas iniquitates haud perinde obstinante, donec indulgentia fortunae et pravis magistris <di>dicit aususque est* ("At the beginning of his reign, Vespasian himself was not really so set on retaining injustices, until he learned and dared to do them because of the favor of fortune and depraved teachers," 2.84). Neither does the last of the four pretenders distinguish himself in the field, as fighting is left to his generals Mucianus and Primus. Instead, Tacitus emphasizes the omens and portents that are a great source of interest to both Vespasian and Titus, and that in turn mark them out to the world as the new leaders.

After Mucianus's speech exhorting Vespasian to seize power (2.76–77), the latter is struck by the apparent fulfillment of earlier signs—such as the

restoration of a fallen cypress tree to its original place and vigor—and accepts the encouragements of soothsayers and astrologers: *nec erat intactus tali superstitione, ut qui mox rerum dominus Seleucum quendam mathematicum rectorem et praescium palam habuerit* ("Vespasian was not untouched by superstition of such a kind that, when he later became master of the Empire, he retained one Seleucus, an astrologer, as his advisor and fortune-teller," 2.78.1). Prior to this incident, probably in the summer of 68, he visits Mount Carmel (2.78), between Judaea and Syria, which possesses no image or temple of the god worshipped there.⁹ Turning over hidden aspirations (*spes occultas*) as he sacrifices, he is approached by the priest, auspiciously named Basilides, who prophesies the following: *'quidquid est' inquit, 'Vespasiane, quod paras, seu domum exstruere seu prolatare agros sive ampliare servitia, datur tibi magna sedes, ingentes termini, multum hominum.'* ("He said: 'Whatever you are planning, Vespasian, whether it is to build a house, extend your land, or enlarge your slaveholding, a great foundation is granted you, and vast boundaries, and a multitude of people,' " 2.78.3). Afterward, *fama* spreads this enigmatic report to the *volgus*, who eagerly receive it: *has ambages et statim exceperat fama et tunc aperiebat: nec quidquam magis in ore volgi*. At this point, the issue of the venture scarcely in doubt (*haud dubia destinatione*), Vespasian and Mucianus leave for separate destinations.

M. Gwyn Morgan remarks that Tacitus distances this episode from the surrounding narrative by the asyndeton and anastrophe with which he introduces it: *Est Iudaeam inter Syriamque Carmelus*.¹⁰ From this, he infers that it must have taken place a year or so before the acclamation of Vespasian on 1 July 69. But Tacitus draws attention to it also in order to emphasize the importance of *superstitio*—and all the accompanying omens, portents and prophecies—to the establishment of the Flavian regime. The belief of the *volgus* (in this case, the common soldiers) legitimates a sign that had at the time been ambiguous, but that *fama* later revealed (*aperiebat*). This sentence is itself ambiguous: Tacitus might mean either that report initially seizes upon the incident but makes it public only later, or that after its disclosure it is not fully understood until Vespasian receives the exhortation from Mucianus and other favorable signs from astrologers (*OLD* 11 and 12). In either case, the significance of the episode results from the time lag between the pluperfect of *exceperat fama* and the imperfect *aperiebat*, which takes us back to the present of the narrative—that is, shortly before 1 July 69, and the reaction to Mucianus's speech.

The further, larger consequence of the prophecy would have to wait for the post-Flavian reader. Once established, Vespasian worked hard to rein-

vigorate state fiscal circumstances, a process that involved amalgamating his own lands and estates as princeps with those of the state. M. Rostovtzeff notes that, in addition to greatly increasing Vespasian's own wealth, "the system of management which the greatest landowner in the Empire should decide to adopt, far from being a matter of indifference, was in reality of supreme importance for the economic life of the Roman world as a whole."¹¹ Tacitus therefore offers his reader this prophecy not only as an allegory for the supreme power that Vespasian would soon wield, but also as a straightforward and tangible indication of history to come: a "small letter," perhaps, for a feature of Vespasian's rule that he would discuss later in the *Histories*. Yet Tacitus diminishes its import by putting it into the mouths of the *volgus* as gossip, and in Vespasian's own circle as "frequent conversation" (*crebriores . . . sermones*) for those who have reason to hope for something (*sperantibus*). This disjunction describes the discourse of the Flavian principate as being simultaneously more overt about the extent of its control over the state and more enmeshed in superstition about the personage of the emperor: the more control the emperor has, the more the prophecies about him appear to come true. But the belief is analeptic. The principate becomes a narrative that can be understood only after one has read the end, a narrative that Tacitus as a historian can only reinforce.

LOOKING BACKWARD, MOVING FORWARD: *RELIGIO VERSUS SUPERSTITIO*

The major change in the principate, as Tacitus figures it in the extant part of the *Histories*, occurs in the relationship between the princeps's secular and sacred authority. The legitimation of Vespasian's power comes largely from a series of divine portents that are also foreign; he finds himself in the novel position of a Western leader backed by the supernatural forces of the East. In this manipulation of the state religious apparatus, he tampers with the association between princeps and divinity that characterized the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Although Augustus had drawn upon this association as a source of power, the construction of it was rooted in tradition.¹² He did not encourage ceremonies for himself or his adoptive father in any forms other than those "developed from traditional ritual which had no associations with kingship."¹³ But the divide between sacred and secular power is not so easily maintained, a lesson Tiberius learns in an encounter with Agrippina the Elder at *Annals* 4.52. Distressed at the persecution of her

relative, Claudia Pulchra, Agrippina demands of Tiberius, who is at that moment sacrificing to the divine Augustus, that he recognize her as a descendant of that divinity and treat her (and therefore her friends) with greater respect. In so doing, she confuses the functionality of divinity with belief in its supernatural power. In this system, which has a religion but no theology, association with the divinity has no mortal implications. Her relation to Augustus does not guarantee her a position of power. Tiberius corrects her in Greek verse: the fact that she did not rule was not an insult (i.e., to her "divinity").

Divinity and secular power were thus two different things, with *religio* as the intermediary between the two. *Religio*, as Cicero implies, is the practice of cultivating the favor of the gods with sacrifices and by taking auspices, which, while inherited from the "erroneous" beliefs of the *maiores*, ought nevertheless to be respected and retained:

Et tamen credo Romulum, qui urbem auspicato condidit, habuisse opinionem esse in providendis rebus augurandi scientiam (errabat enim multis in rebus antiquitas), quam, vel usu iam, vel doctrina, vel vetustate immutatam videmus; retinetur autem et ad opinionem vulgi et ad magnas utilitates rei publicae mos, religio, disciplina, ius augurarium, collegi auctoritas. (Div. 2.70)

Nevertheless, I also believe that Romulus, who founded the city by means of auspices, was of the opinion that there was a science of augury for seeing future events (for people in those days held many erroneous beliefs); which we see has changed, either because of experience, education, or age. But custom, religious practices, discipline, the augural rite, and the authority of its college we have retained for the belief of the masses and great usefulness to the state.¹⁴

As Emil Benveniste points out, *religio* is etymologically derived from the verb *legere* ("choose," in the contemporary sense of "be choosy"), and the term therefore signifies "a hesitation that holds one back, a scruple that hinders, not a feeling that propels one toward action or to practice cult-worship."¹⁵ This definition highlights the inherently conservative nature of *religio* that we see in Cicero's discussion of it: a state approved, time-sanctioned cultural medium that discourages the introduction of new (foreign) cults and can restrain worship of existing ones to prescribed rituals and practices. Such practices apply also to the cults of divinized emperors; when Agrippina finds Tiberius sacrificing to the divinized Augustus, Tacitus describes the emperor's activity with the ritual verb *mactare*, "To honor (a god) with sacrifice" (*OLD* 1b). Belief, in the Judaeo-Christian sense of "believing in God," has little to do with this institution. As

W. Warde-Fowler puts it, "The effective desire to be in right relationship with these mysterious powers, so that they might not interfere with his material well-being . . . this is what we may call the religious instinct, the origin of what the Romans call *religio*."¹⁶

Cicero, in his endorsement of *religio*, distinguishes between two classes of individuals: those who regulate practice, and those whose practice is regulated. The latter (the *volgus*) apparently needs an outlet for its *opinio*, which might otherwise threaten the state. The *volgus*'s perception of its own relation to power is therefore harmlessly diverted into rituals that it believes to have effect on the life and well-being of the devotee, leaving the more educated classes to manipulate worldly power, though they themselves cultivate the same religious practices. The difference appears to reside in levels of belief, and Cicero suggests that indeed the *volgus* does believe. The circular logic of power dictates the policing of lower-class beliefs by *religio* but requires the naïveté and malleability that such belief entails. Cicero condemns *superstitio* for having overtaken the *animos* and *imbecillitatem* of human beings (*Div.* 2.148), but his own authority also demands a level of credulity from his inferiors. Expressing the desire to eradicate *superstitio*, he also reassures his reader that to destroy it will not destroy *religio*, which, he says, is constituted in the "institutions, sacred rites, and ceremonies of our ancestors." But these would hardly support the existing hierarchy of government if a concomitant hierarchy of belief did not exist.¹⁷

To clarify, then, *religio* appears to include a component of belief, but only among the lower classes, and firmly constrained by tradition.¹⁸ *Superstitio* is more difficult to define, but, faute de mieux, it might be said to be any sort of mystical practice or belief that does not conform with *religio*.¹⁹ It therefore represents what is repressed or misrecognized in order for *religio* to have its effect. Mary Beard describes Roman religion as an institution without a center, "a religion whose centre was (in Derridean terms) constantly deferred."²⁰ Religious law was based upon tradition, open to reinterpretation by the authorities who advised the Senate, and this authority was widely distributed among the ruling class. The relationship between *religio* and *superstitio* can be understood as a function of this deferral, which exists to anchor the existing relationship between classes while ensuring the free movement of power within the ruling elite. *Religio* is a free-floating concept, designed as a signifier of the status quo that may be interpreted in a variety of ways. *Superstitio* is anything that threatens it.²¹

Cicero's formulation of the two concepts is fundamentally cynical; he himself believes that knowledge, in the form of education, has overtaken the significance of the old customs, but they nonetheless serve a useful ide-

ological purpose. From this "ideology of the people" he believes he has distance, whereas he in fact exhibits the same sort of "fantasy" as the *volgus* to which he claims superior knowledge. He *believes* that gestures of traditional worship are a matter of habit and social conformity but at the same moment *acts* as if they were transcendental, nowhere more evidently than at *De Haruspicum Responso* 9.23–25: *sed pietate ac religione atque hac una sapientia, quod deorum numine omnia regi gubernarique perspeximus, omnis gentis nationesque superavimus* ("But with piety, religion, and this one knowledge—namely, that we have realized all things are ruled and governed by the power of the gods—we have conquered every people and nation").²²

Marx speaks similarly of "the religion of everyday life," in which an inversion occurs in the relations between the "abstract and universal" and the "sensible and concrete."²³ On the one hand, the value of the former manifests itself only in everyday forms that everyone understands very well: in the case of Roman *religio*, the expression of divine power in concrete rituals. On the other, the value of the latter is expressed in terms of its status as a manifestation of the former: Cicero's invocation of *religio* as a manifestation of the divine favor that accords power to Rome, for example. Interpreting this movement as "the fundamental level of ideology," Žižek comments that it "is not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself."²⁴ To Cicero, this "unconscious fantasy" is described as *superstitio*, and rejected.

What Tacitus shows in his narrative of the Flavian ascent is a shift in the perception of *superstitio* that represents major change in the ideology of power relations. The early Empire found it expedient to retain a religious discourse similar to that of Cicero's Republic, in the same way as it retained a political one. For a princeps attempting to govern autocratically within a republican system, there could be no question of personal worship other than that of his status as a man of great power. So much we can tell from his refusal of divine honors for his lifetime, and the solution in the provinces of the official cult of "Rome and Augustus."²⁵ But Tacitus suggests that Vespasian's relationship to the divine evokes the previously excoriated response of *superstitio*, a willingness to believe in the emperor's ability to perform magic (the healing miracle in Alexandria, 4.81), and in omens that portend his success in every particular (e.g., the prophecy on Mount Carmel, 2.78). Cicero warns Quintus at *De Divinatione* 2.149 that he is to be on guard against the *superstitio* that every prophecy, omen, augury, and prodigy can evoke: namely, that although these represent com-

mon aspects of religious practice, they are not to be *believed*. But in the *Histories*, people contravene Cicero's admonition and exhibit precisely that sort of belief against which he so strenuously argues, raising the stakes embodied in the value inversion between abstract and concrete that we see in Cicero's formulations of *religio* and *superstitio*.

Kenneth Scott points out that reports of omens all but cease once Vespasian accedes to power, and that whether he believed them or not, he made good use of them: "The fact that the flood of events of superhuman character abruptly ceases at the end of the civil war is a good indication that much of it is probably the result of propaganda for Vespasian or against Vitellius."²⁶ What Tacitus had to say about supernatural events after Vespasian became princeps we unfortunately cannot know. However, what we do have suggests that Scott's terminology is insufficient to analyze these events as Tacitus presents them, for the historian does not depict Vespasian as a propagandist, even though his contempt for the flatterers among Flavian historians might certainly have led him to do so.²⁷ Instead, he combines the narrative of Flavian signs and portents with those of older ruling powers: the *genus regium* on Paphos with Titus's visit to that island (2.1–4), and the favor of Serapis toward Ptolemy I with Vespasian's visit to the temple of Serapis in Alexandria (4.81–84). Along with descriptions of other divine powers and prophecies (the imageless god at Mount Carmel; the prophecy of its priest, Basilides; the destruction of the Capitoline at Rome, 3.72–74; and the Jews' misinterpretation of the prophecy about the conqueror from the East, 5.13), the narrative roots Vespasian's ascendancy within a tradition of *superstitio*. This phenomenon is entirely un-Roman, inasmuch as it collapses the distinction between *religio* and *superstitio* that regulated republican ideology as described by Cicero in the *De Divinatione*, and continued thereafter into the Julio-Claudian period. The frenzy of the *volgus* in the *Histories* represents the result of the loss of this distinction that Cicero insists be kept precisely to provide ideological parameters. But the foundation of Cicero's own distinction between the *volgus* and his own class demonstrates the fictional nature of the split between *religio* and *superstitio*. The *volgus* will always be ready to believe; what is important is that their belief be contained within practices prescribed by the ruling class, like the English landed aristocracy attending church "religiously" so as to present an example to their tenants.²⁸ Vespasian's principate reveals this fiction and substitutes that of *superstitio tout court*.

In the late Republic, the ruling class exhibits a kind of cynicism about its own ideological position that allows Cicero to speak so frankly, but anti-

thetically, about the importance of *religio*. When Vespasian accedes, Eprius Marcellus expresses a similarly antithetical attitude in his formulation of the relationship between Senate and emperor: *ulteriora mirari, praesentia sequi; bonos imperatores voto expetere, qualescumque tolerare* ("[He said that] he admired previous generations, went along with the present one; sincerely wished for good emperors, but put up with whoever came along," 4.8.2). Priscus, his adversary in this debate, believes himself above the current circumstances, and worthy of directing the emperor's action. He quarrels with Marcellus over who should be sent to Vespasian as legates, since these will instruct the latter as to "whom to favor, whom to fear" (4.7.3), and should therefore be morally irreproachable. But the subtext of the altercation is the understanding of supreme power. Priscus believes it to be subject to approbation, as if the emperor were still princeps *inter pares*, a position he knows is untenable, but that he pursues until Vespasian eventually cannot support it any longer.²⁹

Although Priscus understands the situation very well, he assumes the mask of republican naïveté to make a political point.³⁰ However, it is Marcellus who misrecognizes his role: his cynicism represents a putative ability to penetrate the veil of ideology, even if in his actions he goes along with it, but it belies a fundamental blindness to its own role in sustaining it. "The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion which is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality."³¹ Marcellus wants the legates to be chosen by lot, according to what he calls *vetera exempla* ("time-honored precedent"), but Tacitus tells us that his real motivation was to spare his own embarrassment if others should win, thereby enacting for the reader the distinction between Marcellus's inside/outside relationship with ideology. Whether he seeks this traditional method for personal reasons or not, he is drawn into defending it *as if* he believed that the law were a kind of universal truth that resided in tradition, whereas he later speaks in world-weary fashion of the need to bear up under supreme power, pace one's own distaste for it:

Marcellus non suam sententiam impugnari, sed consulem designatum censuisse dicebat, secundum vetera exempla, quae sortem legationibus posuissent, ne ambitioni aut inimicitii locus foret. nihil evenisse, cur antiquitus instituta exolerent aut principis honor in cuiusquam contumeliam verteretur; sufficere omnes obsequio. (4.8.1)

Marcellus said that it was not his own idea under attack, but that the consul-designate had decreed it, following time-honored precedent, which laid down lots for legates so that bribery and hostility should

be given no quarter. There was no reason why the venerable practice should become obsolete, or why honoring the princeps should be turned into an insult against someone. Everyone was good enough for obedience.

In his defense of the practice, he mingles the “time-honored precedent” with the rather new one of making obeisance to one person. It is a good strategy for this part of the argument, because it combines the need for two sorts of unquestioning obedience. However, it does not work as well for his more nonchalant point about “taking them as they come.” If we take *sufficere omnes obsequio* as potentially ironic, the transition between these two sections of the argument is less jarring; but irony will not win this argument. He must prove at least the sincerity of his opinion about the method of choosing in order to win the debate; but Tacitus undercuts this sincerity by baldly stating that Marcellus had ulterior motives. It becomes impossible, then, to tell whether Marcellus is “serious” or not, as he appears to be both aware of playing the system, and making credible arguments to uphold it; in addition, his cynicism about emperors is blended with his argument about investing credibility in the power of chance because of the antiquity of its tradition. With the former, he demonstrates the belief that he understands the system but nevertheless participates in it; with the latter, both belief and participation in the system. In Marcellus, Tacitus shows us the naïveté of cynicism, and in Priscus the cynicism of naïveté. For the latter, Priscus eventually pays with his life.

It has often been assumed that Marcellus in some way speaks for Tacitus, who enjoyed favorable notice even from a bad emperor.³² But the crucial distinction between the two—keeping in mind that both Marcellus and the narrator of the *Histories* are narrative constructs—lies more in the way they apprehend their ideological positions than in the fact that Marcellus is, as Syme puts it, essentially a “bad man.” And the relative moralities of Marcellus and Priscus are, in this scene, of less importance than what their debate reveals about the relationship between knowledge and power. Marcellus behaves as if the power invested in one figure divests the world of ideology, and things can be seen for “what they really are,” even if they cannot be publicly acknowledged; Priscus stubbornly adheres to a subversive principle that publicly advertises its ideology, a kind of ideological guerilla. But Tacitus’s outlook, as the narrator of the *Histories*, is expressed by neither.

In his criticism of Seneca in *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine articulates the paradigm of *superstitio* as inherently but unwittingly ironic, a fitting description also for the positions of Marcellus and Priscus. In a lost text, cited

in some particulars by Augustine, Seneca describes the current religious practices as so many examples of *superstitio*. Nonetheless, if Augustine's citation is correct, he endorses the observance of these practices for the sake of law and custom, for which Augustine chastises him:

sed iste, quem philosophi quasi liberum fecerunt, tamen, quia inlustri populi Romani senator erat, colebat quod reprehendebat, agebat quod arguebat, quod culpabat adorabat; quia videlicet magnum aliquid eum philosophia docuerat, ne superstitiosus esset in mundo, sed propter leges civium moresque hominum non quidem ageret fingentem scaenicum in theatro, sed imitaretur in templo; eo damnabilius, quo illa, quae mendaciter agebat, sic ageret, ut eum populus veraciter agere existimaret; scaenicus autem ludendo potius delectaret, quam fallendo deciperet. (De civ. D. 6.10)

But [Seneca], whom philosophy made free, as it were, nevertheless, because he was a famous senator of the Roman people, worshipped what he reprehended, engaged in that which he refuted, cultivated what he blamed. Philosophy had evidently taught him something important: not to be superstitious in this world, but for the sake of civil law and custom, not to perform a made-up act in the theater, but to imitate it in the temple. This is the more reprehensible for the fact that what he did mendaciously, he did so that the people would believe in the truth of his action; but an actor gives pleasure more by playing, than deceives by misleading.

Whereas Cicero makes a sharp distinction between *superstitio* and *religio* for legal and political reasons, Seneca calls it all *superstitio* but still advocates its practice. Cicero believes not so much in the evidence of a boundary between the two as the necessity of setting certain ideological parameters, to which he then unwittingly binds himself. But what Augustine deplores in Seneca is the simultaneous ironic recognition of—and willing obedience to—this lack of distinction between the two concepts. Cicero owes his position to the sociopolitical forms that constitute the Republic. He therefore knows that they exist for a very concrete reason, but in his own everyday perception and expression of them, he acts as if they are, in Žižek's words, "just so many embodiments of universal Value."³³ Žižek is talking in Marxist terms about money, but the formulation works equally well for the religious forms that lend support to state power in the late Republic. By Seneca's era, by contrast, that universal Value has been embodied in the principate; it has been put on display. There can no longer be any question of there not being such a Value structuring social reality, so *superstitio*, or rather the collapse of the distinction between *religio* as ra-

tional and *superstitio* as irrational, is absolutely the appropriate response. Before Vespasian, some cloak-and-dagger still existed with the way in which this power could express itself—hence Augustine’s stage metaphors for Seneca’s behavior—but after the civil war and the revelation of the military nature of the principate, it is hardly surprising that belief should follow practice in the worship of the emperor.

FORTUNA AND FATUM: THE NARRATIVE OF *SUPERSTITIO*

Tacitus introduces the Flavians to the narrative at 2.1.1: *Struebat iam fortuna in diversa parte terrarum initia causasque imperio, quo varia sorte laetum rei publicae aut atrox, ipsis principibus prosperum vel exitio fuit* (“In a different part of the world, Fortune was already building the beginnings and causes for an *imperium*, which was by various turns happy or terrible for the state, and for the *principes* themselves prosperous or destructive”).³⁴ The phrasing resembles the narrative pattern at 1.1–4, in which Tacitus talks about the *initium* of his own work (*initium mihi operis*), the *ratio causaeque* of the events he will discuss, and the omens that characterize this period of history: *laeta tristia, ambigua manifesta; nec enim umquam atrocioribus populi Romani cladibus magisve iustis indiciis adprobatum est non esse curae deis securitatem nostram, esse ultionem* (“happy sad omens, ambiguous manifest ones; nor was it ever proved by more atrocious disasters of the Roman people or more just signs that the gods did not care about our safety, but our punishment,” 1.3.2).

The *Histories* thus links the fortunes of the Roman state closely with those of the Flavian dynasty, narratively presaging the latter with the descriptions of omens that menace the latter. Vespasian and Titus incarnate the *laeta* of 1.3 as the representatives of *laetum imperium* in 2.1; Domitian the *tristia* and the *atrox* in both. The admonition concerning the gods has received various commentary. Syme asserts that it “suits Tacitus’s purpose” to claim such an attitude for the gods, and that his “writings (it can be argued) are morally subversive, not safely to be recommended for children”;³⁵ Chilver (on 1.3.9) discusses it in terms of Roman religious understanding and literary allusion, notably from Lucan 4.808. But this apparently hyperbolic gloom acts not as a moral statement, but as a kind of Freudian slip for the secret of empire—the *arcanum imperii*—that follows in 1.4. This *arcanum*, that the Empire is founded on an anticonstitutional act, provides the *ratio* for the *eventus* of Nero’s death. The death is a pri-

mal scene, immediately repressed and channeled through desire (the *volgus's* regret at its loss) to language and action, which in the *Histories* we have seen to be both aimless and violent. The primal scene is therefore also the *ultio*, as it introduces a series of events that have apparently no intention or purpose: no one is there to guide the “master plot” of empire, and libidinal forces break out from under its barrier.³⁶ The real *arcanum* is not the creation of the princeps by the army, but the crime upon which the Empire is founded, and which Tacitus lets out when he describes the cosmic forces as punishing.

Tacitus's formulation of the gods' attitude reverses that of Cicero in *Pro Marcello* 18, where Cicero tells Caesar that he has so appeased the gods who were punishing the state with civil war that he has regained their favor:

Quidam enim non modo armatis, sed interdum etiam otiosis minabantur, nec quid quisque sensisset, sed ubi fuisset cogitandum esse dicebant; ut mihi quidem videantur di immortales, etiam si poenas a populo Romano ob aliquod delictum expetiverunt, qui civile bellum tantum et tam luctuosum excitaverunt, vel placati iam vel satiati aliquando omnem spem salutis ad clementiam victoris et sapientiam contulisse.

For certain men [Pompeians] were threatening not only those who were armed, but even sometimes noncombatants. They said that what should be taken into account was not what each person had thought, but where he had been; so that the immortal gods, even if they sought a penalty from the Roman people for some offense and who stirred up a civil war so great and so grievous, seem to me now—either because they have now been placated or satisfied—to have bestowed all prospects of a good outcome upon the clemency and wisdom of the victor.

Cicero's gods bring civil war itself as the punishment for the side that eventually lost; it is their culpability that he highlights in this speech delivered in front of Caesar. This of course makes no sense: a civil war has two sides from the outset, so Cicero here employs hindsight to confer upon Caesar the favor of the gods, a gesture to which he alludes by referring to Caesar as victor. He therefore recognizes the connection between the new mode of government and the rhetoric of divinity. Tacitus, by contrast, begins his *Histories* by describing the terrible state of affairs that predated the all-out breakdown of the year 69, and even the revolt of Vindex and Galba. It is Nero's so-called reign of terror to which he must be referring; in other words, if Cicero heralds the beginning of empire by welding Cae-

sar to the gods, Tacitus reports its dissolution by breaking them apart, until the advent of the Flavians. The omens and prophecies play an important role in the narrative of their accession, not only because they show (or do not show) something about the historian's own beliefs or about the history of religion or even about the development of Vespasian's confidence as part of a narrative pattern,³⁷ but because they reinvent the beginning of the principate when the state was under control. Vespasian is Augustus, with the important difference that the republican relationship with the Senate has been effectively severed, and an old ideology transformed.³⁸

Tacitus here delineates imperial ideology in 69 as a narrative with no parameters: that is, no narrative at all. He first expresses self-consciousness about imposing narrative upon these events at 1.4.1, where he sets himself the paradoxical task of explaining the "reasons and causes" (*ratio* and *causae*) of "fallouts and events" (*casus* and *eventus*) that he says are actually "matters of chance" (*fortuiti*). He repeats this theme at 2.1, where he considers the rise of the Flavians to be the result of *fortuna*, and the omens and prophecies that heralded it to be *fortuita* (although the *volgus* believes in them). The combination of these etymological variations highlights the ambiguity of "fortune," the temporal location where the future and the past come together. From the historian's sneering perspective on the credulous *volgus*, it demonstrates hindsight: Vespasian really did come to power, so *fortuna* must have destined him to do so. At 1.10, Tacitus remarks upon the role of omens and belief in the Flavian accession: *occulta fati et ostentis ac responsis destinatum Vespasiano liberisque eius imperium post fortunam credidimus* ("We believed in the secrets of fate, and that the *imperium* was destined by signs and portents to belong to Vespasian and his children, after the event"). Here he includes himself among the people whose credulity he apparently despises, indicating the inextricability of his personal narrative from that of empire.³⁹

Fortuna also represents prediction, as in 1.3, where the rumblings in the sky and on earth are *futurorum praesagia*. Exactly what Tacitus means by this phrase is not clear in this context, as the bad omens might be expected to refer to the atrocities of the year 69. But the temporal marker *futurorum* obviates this, indicating instead the dynasty to come, which, as noted above, will indeed fulfill the "happy sad" and "ambiguous manifest" omens. When Titus consults the priest at the temple of Paphian Venus (2.4), he first asks for divination about the more neutral subject of his journey back to his father, then in more veiled terms (*per ambages*) about future prospects. The priest replies in conventional terms: *pauca in praesens et solita respondens* ("saying for the moment a few customary things"),

but then, *petito secreto, futura aperit*. The phrase is generally understood to mean that the priest took Titus to one side before revealing prophecies of such weight ("with a [private] audience sought, he revealed the future," OLD 3a). In this context, however, Tacitus signals the priest's demand for an audience in order that *Titus* reveal what he was really talking about ("with the secret having been sought," OLD 4a). This interpretation evinces the impossibility of prophecy without clear knowledge of what is wanted in the present, thereby demonstrating the relationship of *fortuna* to the events leading up to it. The description of Titus's request *per ambages* can be compared with the way in which the people at Alexandria "know" that the statue in the temple of Serapis, where Vespasian heals two sick people, is that of Jupiter Dis (4.84.5): on the one hand, by visible signs; on the other, by some esoteric legend (*per ambages*).⁴⁰ Each confirms the other with a kind of circular logic. Once Titus comes clean, the priest reveals the *futura* ("the things that were to be"), but the interpretation of *futura* depends upon whether we view them from the priest's perspective (i.e., as a future prediction) or Tacitus's (i.e., through hindsight). In the immortal words of Anita Loos, "Fate keeps on happening";⁴¹ and *fatum*, as Tacitus shows us at the beginning of the next book, is really the working out of *fortuna*, viewed with hindsight: *Meliore fato fideque partium Flavianarum duces consilia belli tractabant*. ("With better fate and loyalty [than Vitellius], the leaders of the Flavian faction were drawing up their plans for war," 3.1). As the narrative progresses, chance events look toward their conclusion, which in the end will seem inevitable.⁴²

THE MIRACLE AT ALEXANDRIA

Upon his acclamation at Alexandria, Vespasian is approached by a blind man who asks that he cure him by spitting in his eye, and by a man crippled in his hand who wants Vespasian to tread on him:

Vespasianus primo inridere aspernari; atque illis instantibus modo famam vanitatis metuere, modo obsecratione ipsorum et vocibus adulantium in spem induci: postremo aestimari a medicis iubet, an talis caecitas ac debilitas ope humana superabiles forent. medici varie disserere: huic non exesam vim luminis et redituram, si pellerentur obstantia; illi elapsos in pravum artus, si salubris vis adhibeatur, posse integrari; id fortasse cordi deis et divino ministerio principem electum; denique patrati remedii gloriam penes Caesarem, inriti ludibrium penes miseros fore. igitur Vespasianus cuncta fortunae suae patere ratus nec quicquam ultra incredibile,

laeto ipse voltu, erecta quae adstabat multitudine, iussa exsequitur. statim conversa ad usum manus, ac caeco reluxit dies, utrumque qui interfuere nunc quoque memorant, postquam nullum mendacio pretium. (4.81)

At first, Vespasian laughed and refused; when they kept up their pleas, he feared at one moment the reputation of vanity, the next he was led to hope by their entreaties and the cries of flatterers. Finally he ordered doctors to examine whether such blindness or handicap could be overcome by human agency. The doctors had various things to say: that the strength of one's eyes was not entirely destroyed and would return if the obstacles were removed; and that the limbs of the other, though degenerated, could be made whole if a salutary power were applied. Perhaps it was pleasing to the gods, and the princeps had been chosen as a divine minister. At any rate, the glory of a cure would belong to Caesar; humiliation, if it was not effected, to the afflicted. So Vespasian, having decided that everything lay open to his fortune and that nothing was beyond credibility, with a happy expression and a crowd of hopeful bystanders, carried out the demands. Immediately the hand was made good, and the daylight shone for the blind man. And those who were present at both cures remember them even now, even though there is no reward for lying.

These ailments, blindness and a withered hand, metaphorically represent the state of the Empire when Vespasian inherits it. Although Suetonius (*Vesp.* 7) and Dio's Epitome 65.8 attest them too, Tacitus thematizes sight and touch in setting out the problem of the simulacrum, embodied particularly in the Vitellian narrative. The society that Vespasian encounters has lost a reality that can be seen and grasped; Tacitus accords him the role of dubious benefactor.⁴³ We surely cannot ignore that Vespasian performs his miracle by spitting in the one sufferer's face and stepping upon the other.

Tacitus could have engaged his customary skepticism and assigned the narrative of this miracle to those he asserts were eyewitnesses (*interfuere qui*), but instead takes responsibility for its historicity with a direct statement. If he had not done so, the story would undermine the Flavian rise with a gesture we understand as particularly "Tacitean." Reversing the roles, however, his narrative of the episode reflects the new standard for truth. The willingness of the eyewitnesses to vouch for the story (*memorant*), to "recall," for no profit, a fantastic story about the emperor's supernatural power, transcends the realm of *amor* and *odium*, and the *veritas* with which they are associated (1.1). Instead, *adulatio* (as given by the crowd of *adulantes* at the event) becomes a commonly accepted procedure.

In 1.1, Tacitus distinguishes the two kinds of relationship he had with the people in his narrative: those he knew and those he did not. The latter (i.e., Galba, Otho, and Vitellius) he describes as those from whom he received no *beneficium* or *iniuria*, but in connection with the former (the Flavians) he describes only his career (*dignitas nostra*), which advanced steadily under each one. This he says he does not wish to deny (*non abnuerim*), but the rhetoric of favor and injury that he associates with *amor* and *odium*, and with it the notion of truth as a balance, has dropped away. The Julio-Claudian perception of “truth,” based upon the rhetoric of subservience and hatred, yields to the acknowledging of “official truth” under the “*princeps a diis electus*,” whose omnipotence makes *amor* and *odium* irrelevant.⁴⁴ There is only one way of talking about the princeps now, and that goes for Tacitus as well.

Amor (or *ambitio*) in 1.1 signifies the lack of *veritas*, or *libertas*, which is present only as a *falsa species*, in *malignitas*. At the time of the post-Actium writers, these terms were touchstones for truth. Nero’s reign shifted the paradigm because of his appeal for the *populus*: he fulfilled a dream of democracy in his unbridled lifestyle and antisenatorial/aristocratic attitude.⁴⁵ Tacitus describes the aftermath of his death as a kind of apotheosis of *adulatio*; hence the false Neros and other indicators of the strength of the *volgus*’s feeling for him. The “survival” of Nero in 69 ushers in the new *episteme* of *adulatio* with which Tacitus characterizes the start of the Flavian regime. Lacking the old guidelines for truth and falsehood, language becomes a split arena: on the one hand, there are the necessary gestures toward supreme power, which no longer have anything to do with *veritas*; on the other, thought is now free, because not constrained to think itself through a dyarchic structure of *amor* and *odium*. This does not at all engender knowledge of the Real, or freedom of expression, but rather the kind of “funny language” that results from the thought/word split (“You order us to be free, and we are free”; “It is allowed that you think what you want and say what you think”).⁴⁶ Individual psychology actually recedes farther, as official language creates degrees of sincerity within itself, not between itself and individual perceptions of truth or falsehood. This is what makes Pliny’s *Panegyricus* such a difficult document to interpret: “sincere flattery” belongs to a language that accommodates itself to absolute power by encroaching upon the individual’s capacity to distinguish “truth” from “lies,” a process that under the Julio-Claudians was relatively simple.

With the advent of Vespasian, one truth is revealed—the military nature of the principate—and receives official documentation in the dating of his acclamation (2.79.1); but the perception of the nature of power is fur-

ther mystified, and the ability to express the relationship between power and its subjects further obscured. In this sense, his acclamation acts as both a “big letter” to the “small letter” of *miles* in *Annals* 1.7, and a “small letter” to the development of the principate that follows. Similarly, Basilides’ prophecy that Vespasian will have a large house with limitless boundaries (2.78.3) suggests the retrospective fruition of a suggestion Tacitus later makes at *Annals* 1.1: *Tiberii Gaique et Claudii ac Neronis res florentibus ipsis ob metum falsae* (“The affairs of Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, and Nero were false because of fear when they themselves were alive”). *Res* is to be understood as referring to the histories that were written under these emperors, particularly with the following verb *compositae sunt*. But within its own phrase, *res* also carries overtones of phrases such as *res publica* and *res populi*. It was precisely the point of empire that *res* did not belong any more to the people, though this was to be covered up. Tacitus seems to be punning here: no longer *populi* or *publica* but *Tiberii* (etc.), *res* were a sham, or figment. Now, under Vespasian, *res* are no longer *falsae* because they overtly belong to him. The Empire is his house.⁴⁷

The people who were present at the healing, and make mention of it even though there is no reward for doing so, exemplify the new imperial subject, whose *adulatio* has become internalized. Speaking of the healing, Tacitus seems to put himself in the same category, except for the fact that the following story—about how the god Serapis came to Egypt—gives us clues as to how to read what precedes it. In particular, Tacitus says that he is the first Roman author to give this account, which, if it can be understood as an allegory for the current ideology, suggests that he differentiates between understanding and awareness. The former belongs to the historian, who sees through the archaeology of regimes to make a narrative of letters both big and small, whereas the latter characterizes the person who perceives the components of existence but not their relation to past or future, nor his own place in relation to them.

The elements of the Serapis story are as follows (4.83–84): a beautiful young man appears to Ptolemy I in a dream, ordering that a statue of himself be brought from Pontus. Ptolemy consults various sources who know about Pontus, and discovers that temples to Jupiter Dis and Proserpina lie in the city of Sinope. Upon satisfying his curiosity, Ptolemy promptly forgets all about the matter and turns his mind to pleasure, but the vision returns in a much more threatening manner. He then consults the oracle of Apollo, who says that the image of Apollo’s father is to be fetched back to Egypt. Ptolemy then sends ambassadors and gifts to Scydrthemis, king of Sinope, but the latter hesitates to come to any decision. After three years,

the vision appears to him, demanding that he comply with the wishes of the Egyptian envoys. When he delays further, plagues and disasters occur; nevertheless, the people grow angry at his decision to hand over the statue and block the way to the temple. At that point, according to some, a miracle occurred: the god himself walked on board the ship, whereupon it reached Alexandria in a record three days. A temple is then built in the place where a shrine to Serapis and Isis had existed for a long time.

At the conclusion of this narrative, Tacitus mentions other versions of the story that put Serapis's home in Seleucia and his arrival in Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy III. Still others say he was from Memphis, or that he was not Serapis but Aesculapius or Osiris or Jupiter. These addenda couple with some narrative slips in the story itself to suggest the coexistence of plausibility and incredibility. Tacitus accords responsibility for the narrative first to Egyptian priests, who *memorant*, like the witnesses to Vespasian's miracle. Their account takes the narrative to the point where the god walks on board the ship, at which point Tacitus interrupts by saying: *maior hinc fama tradidit . . .* ("from thence the greater story had it that . . .," 4.84.3). The incredible part of the story is not vouched for by any definite source, and Tacitus does not provide a credible antidote to it. The arrival of the god in Alexandria is therefore shrouded in mystery, particularly as a temple of Serapis, and therefore presumably the god, already exist there. The significance of the image, and indeed exactly what it is an image of, is not specified: by the end of the story, we discover that it could have been any one of a number of different deities. The vision does not identify himself to Ptolemy, but from his youth and beauty he has more in common with the god Dionysus than with Jupiter Dis; the majority opinion after his arrival in Alexandria remains uncertain: *plurimi Ditem patrem insignibus, quaeque in ipso manifesta, aut per ambages coniectant* ("The majority think that he is Dis the Father either on the basis of marks on the statue or because of reasons not plain," 4.84.5).⁴⁸

Whichever god this may be, and Tacitus implies that we cannot know because there is no reliable account, his dream visitation to Ptolemy—promising a *laetum regnum* if his commands are obeyed—is clearly a sign of the divine favor Ptolemy needs in order to consolidate his power.⁴⁹ The temple of Serapis hinges the story of Vespasian's visit and miraculous experience to that of Ptolemy I, indicating that Vespasian receives that same sign. Such an entry into power recalls that of Augustus more strongly than that of any other princeps after him; similarly, Vespasian did not proclaim or portray himself as divinely elected.⁵⁰ However, again like Augustus, he indicated such status obliquely by encouraging the circulation of stories

about his omens and miracles. This rebirth or renovation of the connection between a princeps and the gods signals a new measure of authority, a safeguard against the possibility of rival power.⁵¹ It also recalls the earlier era of Augustus's government: later in his career, he deemphasized the notion of divine monarchical selection as too reminiscent of the coinage struck by late republican dynasts.⁵² Vespasian thus associates himself with the most monarchic phase of the Augustan era (i.e., the one most characterized by lack of clear governmental boundaries) and the one that most benefited by encouraging a reinvention of the notion of power through the process of *fingere/credere* (making up a new role for the leader and believing in it), aided by *superstitio*.⁵³

Galba touches upon this theme in his adoption speech to Piso, in front of the Senate:

*nunc me deorum hominumque consensu ad imperium vocatum
praeclara indoles tua et amor patriae impulit, ut principatum, de
quo maiores nostri armis certabant, bello adeptus quiescenti of-
feram, exemplo divi Augusti, qui sororis filium Marcellum, dein
generum Agrippam, mox nepotes suos, postremo Tiberium
Neronem privignum in proximo sibi fastigio collocavit. (1.15.1)*

Now your outstanding character and love of your country compel me, since I have been called by the consensus of gods and men, to offer you, one who is at peace, the principate, over which our ancestors fought; I having acquired it in war. Such was the example of the divine Augustus, who endowed with the highest honor next to himself Marcellus, son of his sister; then his son-in-law Agrippa; next his nephews; and finally Tiberius Nero his stepson.

Galba intuitively understands the necessity of such rhetoric but does not carry it through completely, resurrecting the memory of the former dynasty and the tenuous practice of familial succession. In choosing Augustus as an example, he wishes both to authorize his own adoption of Piso and to demonstrate its superiority, since Piso is not from his own family. But a system of succession, the problems of which are evident in the long list of Augustus's candidates, is an inherently weak way to transmit an autocracy masquerading as a republican institution. Tacitus's narrative of Vespasian at the temple of Serapis, coupled with this comment he ascribes to Galba, enlarges upon the different source of authority that now arises for the new principate. Similarly, Suetonius remarks at the start of his much more abbreviated narrative of the event that Vespasian did not yet have the *auctoritas* and *maiestas* of a confirmed ruler (*Auctoritas et quasi maiestas quaedam ut scilicet*

inopinato et adhuc novo principi deerat, Vesp. 7.2), but that these were vouchsafed him at this place.

Vespasian's encounter with divinity parallels Titus's to build a composite picture of the role of religion at the beginning of this new era. Hearing the news of Otho's coup, Titus turns back from his voyage to Rome, where his father had sent him to greet Galba (2.1). On his return journey, he puts in at Paphos, attracted by the ancient temple and cult of Venus there. As he does in the narrative of Vespasian in Alexandria, Tacitus provides a digression on the origins of a site-specific religion. Some of the legends are very old, but the most recent has it that a Cinyras consecrated the temple, while the cult was introduced by a foreigner, Tamiras, from Cilicia. For a while, both families officiated at the ceremonies, but Tamiras's ceded control so as not to create ill will among the native inhabitants. The altar is kept pure of blood and never gets wet, even though out-of-doors, and the image of the goddess is not anthropomorphic, but cone-shaped.

Several elements mirror those in the story of Ptolemy and Serapis. Both exemplify foundation narratives in which divine power sanctions an institution of control, as in both cases, the divinities arrive, *sponte sua*, at the sanctuaries that have been created for them: Serapis (or whoever he is) miraculously walks on board the ship (*maior hinc fama tradidit deum ipsum adpulsas litori navis sponte concedisse*); Venus (in the later versions of the story) is brought to Paphos after her birth in the sea (*fama recentior tradit a Cinyra sacratum templum deamque ipsam conceptam mari huc adpulsam*). She is not the Roman Venus, or even the classical Greek Aphrodite, but a much older, chthonic goddess, as her image—a phallic symbol—must show.⁵⁴ In both cases, the visitor is overwhelmed by a desire (*cupido*) to see the place and consult its oracles, and receives favorable omens. In the Paphian Venus story, the institutions of religion (cult) and secular power (the power to found the temple) are for a time combined, but those who are originally responsible for introducing the former give way to the native *genus regium*. The story of Serapis varies the theme: a king (the first of a dynasty) founds several temples and religious cults but imports a divinity from abroad in order to support his regime.

These stories underline the change effected in perceptions of the divine element of the principate at the beginning of the Flavian dynasty. The narrative similarity accorded the religious experiences of Vespasian and Titus distances Domitian from them, just as his reign will prove very different from theirs. But these experiences also indicate a shift in imperial ideology to the notion that the princeps has become a source of *superstitio*, who ac-

tivates a dissolution of the barrier between ritual and belief. Tacitus's various expressions about "making things up and believing them" have this moment of the principate as their source: if the worship of the Julio-Claudians as *divi* can be called a *fiction*, the "truth" of which was not so much an issue as the appropriate socioreligious gestures, then that of Vespasian becomes a fiction that elicits a rhetoric of belief, at least as Tacitus has it. At 2.1, for example, he comments upon the reaction of the *volgus* to Titus's (aborted) trip to Rome:

sed volgus fingendi avidum disperserat accitum in adoptionem. materia sermonibus senium et orbitas principis et intemperantia civitatis, donec unus eligatur, multos destinandi. augebat famam ipsius Titi ingenium quantaecumque fortunae capax, decor<or>is cum quadam maiestate, prosperae Vespasiani res, praesaga responsa, et inclinatis ad credendum animis loco ominum etiam fortuita. (2.1.1)

But the *volgus*, with an avidity for making things up, had put it about that he had been summoned for adoption. The basis of its gossip was the old age and childlessness of the princeps, and the citizenry's extravagant speculations about many candidates, until one was chosen. The character of Titus himself, fit for a great deal of fortune, was increasing his reputation, as was his handsome and dignified bearing, the prosperous fortunes of Vespasian, predictions fulfilled, and minds inclined to believe that even chance events are omens.

The *volgus*, in other words, is capable of both inventing the reasons for Titus's visit and believing its inventions for reasons that Tacitus emphasizes are totally arbitrary. As I argued above, these happenstances (*fortuita*) become the stuff of *fortuna*, the predestination of the Flavians for success. The very definition of *superstitio* lies in this paragraph between the object of belief (*fortuna*) made-up from the vagaries of *fortuita*, and transmitted by *fama*. Of the latter, Tertullian says the following:

Quid quod ea illi condicio est, ut non nisi cum mentitur, perseveret, et tamdiu vivit, quamdiu non probat? siquidem ubi probavit, cessat esse et, quasi officio nuntiandi functa, rem tradit: exinde res tenetur, res nominatur. nec quisquam dicit, verbi gratia: "hoc Romae aiunt factum," aut: "Fama est illum provinciam sortitum;" sed: "Sortitus est ille provinciam," et: "Hoc factum est Romae." (Apol. 7.9–10)

Why does [*fama*] have this foundation, that not unless it lies, does it persevere, and lives as long as it is not proven? Because when it tells the truth, it ceases to exist, and, as if the duty of making the announcement has been performed, makes the matter known. From

this point on, the matter is grasped, it is named. Neither does anyone say, for example: "*They say* that such-and-such has happened at Rome," or "*The word is* that so-and-so was appointed to a province," but "*So-and-so was* appointed to a province," and "*Such-and-such did* happen at Rome."

Tertullian's comments demonstrate the *Nachleben* of the ideology that Tacitus describes as crystallizing in the narrative of the *Histories*. Writing around a hundred years later (197), four years after a period of civil wars that followed upon the assassination of Commodus and one year after Septimius Severus asserted his divine election with a new type ("Jupiter, naked except for a cloak over his shoulder and holding a scepter in his left hand, clasps right hands with Septimius, who wears military dress and holds a spear. God and emperor are portrayed as equal in size"),⁵⁵ his apprehensions about the discursive environment bear a remarkable resemblance to Tacitus's observation of the collapse that occurs between *finger*e (people say: "They say that . . . ") and *credere* (people believe what they hear). The result is that the two become an inseparable pair (people say: "It is the case that . . . "). Tertullian inherits not only this political ideology, but a structure of political events that practically parallels Tacitus's: a trio of emperors of which the first two (Vespasian-Titus/Antoninus Pius-Marcus Aurelius) are good, inasmuch as an autocrat can be good, and the third (Domitian/Commodus) turns dangerously lunatic. The problem, in the cases of Tertullian's own era, Tacitus's, and that of the year 69, turns on the question of this particular kind of succession and the ideological moves that accompany it.

Both Tertullian and Tacitus describe a situation in which "belief" signifies the adherence to principle without rational cause. When the supremacy of the emperor's power becomes more apparent, so too does the ideology of belief without apparent cause. Whereas, according to republican norms, Julio-Claudian emperors had maintained the appearance of being chosen by the Senate—*princeps inter pares*—Vespasian is the first emperor to date his accession to the day on which his army had taken its oath to him. He is not even close to Rome when Domitian and Mucianus, his second-in-command, begin sending letters too peremptory for the Senate's liking (4.4). The only available course is to follow, since even a tolerant emperor has his limits, as Helvidius Priscus is to discover. Among the *volgus*, this takes the form of awe at the omens and miracles that attend Vespasian, and willingness to repeat them. The attitude of the upper class might be expressed by K. at the end of Kafka's *Trial*:

"I do not agree with that point of view," said K., shaking his head, "for if one accepts it, one must accept as true everything the door-keeper says. But you yourself have sufficiently proved how impossible it is to do that." "No," said the priest, "it is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary." "A melancholy conclusion," said K. "It turns lying into a universal principle."⁵⁶

The Senate and upper class must accept the emperor's right or suitability for the position as a matter of necessity, not arguability. The latter path, once begun, must be followed all the way to assassination, and that, even if successful, is politically a highly volatile proposition. Tacitus therefore writes the history of lying as a universal principle, a principle that, once undertaken, induces belief similar to Cicero's in the *religio* from which he takes cynical distance.⁵⁷ The structure of transference from concrete principle to universal truth is similar for Republic and Empire; the difference lies in the object of belief. This difference can be expressed in two formulations: "They do not know it, but they are doing it" (Republic) and "They know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still they are doing it" (Empire). The former is Marx's definition of ideology in *Capital*; the latter, Žižek's analysis of the "ideological fantasy" that he argues sustains social reality.⁵⁸

Tacitus advances this pattern further in the Vespasian/Serapis episode: between the healing miracle and the narrative about the god arriving in Alexandria, Vespasian enters the temple of Serapis and believes he sees the priest Basilides, who had given him the favorable prophecy at Mount Carmel (2.78.3). Knowing that Basilides is unlikely to be there, he asks the other priests and bystanders if they have seen the man in town or nearby. When they reply negatively, he sends a party to discover Basilides' whereabouts. They return with the news that the priest had been about eighty miles away at the time of the sighting. Vespasian then believes he has witnessed a portent whose meaning lies in Basilides' name. In this incident, we see Vespasian performing similarly to the *volgus* in 2.1, but Tacitus raises the stakes here by literalizing the nothingness (i.e., the absence of the priest) out of which *fortuna* is made, and by assigning the fictive process to the emperor himself. Clearly, this process is not something that the emperor visits upon the people as "propaganda," as he himself is equally susceptible to it, just as Tacitus has previously implicated himself in it with the use of the pronoun "we" when he says: "We believe things *post fortunam*."⁵⁹

When Titus visits the temple of Paphian Venus, he takes a short tour of the place before receiving his prophecy: *Titus spectata opulentia donisque*

regum quaeque alia laetum antiquitatibus Graecorum genus incertae vetustati adfingit, de navigatione primum consuluit ("Having inspected the wealth and gifts of kings, and the many other things that the race of Greeks, which delights in antiquities, imputes to an uncertain antiquity, Titus asked first about his voyage," 2.4.1). The prophecy of Titus's success takes place in a house of flimflam whose venerability is based upon a simulacral antiquity. The Greeks have made the ancient temple "An Ancient Temple," like an exhibit in a theme park; hence Tacitus's description of their race as "*laetum*," as in "antiquities-happy."⁶⁰ In the next sentence, Sostratus, the priest, discovers that the entrails are *laeta et congruentia* ("happy and harmonious"). The terminology of the passage suggests that the double structure of *fingere* and *credere*, *fortuna* and *fatum*, hinges upon the adjective *laetus*, which signifies people's invention of what they want to believe, whether the venerability of antiquity or the predestination for power.⁶¹ Titus's return to his father transfers this *mentalité* to the legions: *Titus aucto animo ad patrem pervectus suspensis provinciarum et exercituum mentibus ingens rerum fiducia accessit* ("With high hopes Titus, conveyed back to his father, arrived as a pledge of faith for the anxious minds of the provinces and armies," 2.4.2). The return of Titus, a popular leader, naturally rouses the men's spirit, but the effect is more significant and widespread and has to do with more than just the good looks and natural dignity described in 2.1. In both chapters, the mood Titus inspires owes its effectiveness to the *volgus*'s (civil or military) own creation of him from *fama* and *praesaga*. The narrative sequence of the visit to Paphian Venus, immediately followed by his glad reception back in Egypt, enhances the causal connection and contributes to Tacitus's depiction of a relationship between ruler and ruled that has suddenly begun a metamorphosis from respectful obeisance of very real power to self-imposed conviction that that power is divinely appointed.

The accompanying discourse for *superstitio* is *adulatio* (flattery), transformed from its old incarnation as *ambitio* (speaking from self-interest, or for the sake of receiving *beneficium*). A different register of truth operates in *adulatio*, one that Tacitus expresses as the narrative gap that intervenes in the story of Ptolemy and Serapis. When the narrative turns incredible, its authorization becomes dubious (*maior hinc fama tradidit . . .*). This doubt reflects upon the people whom Tacitus invokes as the authorities for Vespasian's healing miracle: the *interfuere qui*. Yet he does not offer the stories to invoke disbelief so much as to illustrate a third register between a reality that is external ("objective") or internal ("subjective," or "subject to false consciousness"). This third register consists of the environment

that precedes and enables thought without itself being thinkable or perceptible, embodied in Tacitus's narrative by the fantastic or ancient fables that adhere to the members of the new dynasty. The people who attest to Vespasian's miracle are neither liars nor deluded (hysterical) nor angling for favors, but dealing rather in the symbolic currency associated with the places that first embraced the new Caesars.⁶²

The death and divinization of Vespasian, which would have also been witnessed by those present at his Alexandrian visit, provides further proof of a reality that is always and already ideologically founded. The healing at the temple of Serapis kickstarts his symbolic value in an economy where the emperor is the ultimate signifier: these miracles give credence to his projected status and vice versa, while his divinization retrospectively confirms them.⁶³

In the episodes of the healing and the visit to the temple, Tacitus associates the Flavian dynasty with foreign influence, which merges the sacred and secular functions of the princeps. Unlike at the beginning of the principate, where the function of emperor-worship was embedded in ritual, supreme power has now "proven" itself to be divine and must therefore be worshipped as such, regardless of its incredibility. The *volgus* always believes, but the hierarchy of government finds that whereas before its homage served a political end, it is now in the paradoxical position of believing what it knew before to be a fiction. In the *Histories*, this paradox is narrativized as a juxtaposition of the accession and miracles of Vespasian with the account of Jewish culture and religion at 5.1–13. This excursus, often interpreted as a "straight" Roman representation of the "Other," and although racially offensive to our current cultural sensitivities, useful for its historical content, suffers from being taken so literally. In it, Tacitus consolidates the relationship between the ideology of make-believe and the cultural shift toward *superstitio* that he has investigated throughout the Flavian narrative: through the prism of this alien religion, he shows what cannot be fully understood in the narrative of his own.

According to Tacitus, the Jews at one point had kings. This was when the Hellenistic rulers were weak, and the Roman Empire had not yet come close to Jerusalem:

Tum Iudaei Macedonibus invalidis, Parthis nondum adultis (et Romani procul erant), sibi ipsi reges imposuere; qui mobilitate volgi expulsi, resumpta per arma dominatione fugas civium, urbium eversiones, fratrum coniugum parentum neces aliaque solita regibus ausi superstitionem fovebant, quia honor sacerdotii firmamentum potentiae adsumebatur. (5.8.3)

At the time when the Macedonians were weak, the Parthians not yet at the height of their power (and the Romans were far away), the Jews imposed kings upon themselves. When these had been driven out by the fickle mob, and had recovered their power by arms, they dared to exile citizens; overthrow cities; murder brothers, spouses and parents; and the other usual deeds of tyranny. They also fostered *superstitio*, because they took on the sacerdotal office as a base for their power.

This passage reads like a capsule history of Rome. Particularly significant for the purposes of this chapter are the closing remarks about *superstitio*, which confirm a relationship with absolute power very similar to the one that reaches its maturity at the accession of Vespasian. When all power, both sacred and profane, belongs to one individual, that power is understood via *superstitio* simply by virtue of its ability to make religious policy.⁶⁴ The process of constant deferral that constitutes the distinction between *religio* and *superstitio* comes to a standstill when one individual becomes the touchstone for the significance of all religious practices. But the point that Tacitus makes about the history of the concept following Vespasian is that the old distinction is erased, even though people act as if it were still in place. When Tacitus tells the story about the Jewish kings, he shows his reader clearly the kind of response that despotism fosters, and more directly than is possible with his narrative of Roman events, because within that of the Jews he can enact the Roman understanding of *superstitio* for which he has been arguing. The attitude he adopts would be comprehensible to his Roman contemporaries in part because it summarizes *superstitio* as “that which is not us,” and indeed Tacitus elsewhere emphasizes how extremely foreign the Jews are: they think about religious matters completely differently than anybody else (5.4.1). In his narrative, they are on the one hand a foil for the Roman concept of *religio*, as is evident in his criticism of how they lost the *religio* of their ancestors—that prescribed by Moses, which Tacitus says is defensible by reason of its antiquity—and fell into evil and depraved ways (5.4–5). At one time, then, they had what a Roman would recognize as *religio*, but no longer. So far, Tacitus’s account might be a straightforward representative of the contemporary ideology on *religio* and *superstitio*, except for the fact that he makes “those who are not us” into our mirror image, the ironic representation of contemporary normative notions of the Other.

After discussing the Jewish kings, Tacitus gives a short history of Roman involvement in Judaea (5.9). Gnaeus Pompey first gained control there; Antony and other Roman military luminaries held it subsequently.

The Jews remained relatively quiet, except for a brief uprising or two. Since the fortunes of the Jewish kings were dwindling, Claudius gave the government of the province to Roman knights and freedmen. One of the latter, Antonius Felix, “exercised the office of a king with the character of a slave” (*ius regium servili ingenio exercuit*). He married Drusilla, granddaughter of Cleopatra and Antony, which meant, as Tacitus notes, that at that time there ruled in Rome a grandson, and in Judaea a grandson-in-law, of Antony. This parallel underlines the mirroring of the two states that occurs at the end of the previous chapter, and locates Judaea as the literalization of Tacitus’s ironic vision of Rome, a vision that is consolidated in his attitude toward the prophesied Eastern conqueror at 5.13. Prodigies occurred, he says, that this superstitious people refused to expiate; battlefields and arms appeared in the skies; the temple was illuminated by lightning, its doors thrown open, and a supernatural voice said that the gods were leaving, whereupon a great departure occurred. Following this,

pluribus persuasio inerat antiquis sacerdotum litteris contineri, eo ipso tempore fore ut valesceret Oriens profectique Iudaea rerum potirentur. quae ambages Vespasianum ac Titum praedixerat, sed volgus more humanae cupidinis sibi tantam fatorum magnitudinem interpretati ne adversis quidem ad vera mutabantur.

many were convinced that within the ancient writings of the priests, it was held that at that time the Orient would flourish and that those coming out of Judaea would have power. These enigmas had referred to Vespasian and Titus, but the *volgus*, as is the habit with human greed, interpreted this mighty fate as their own, and was not swayed to the truth even by adversity.

This description of *prodigia* fulfills the one given at 1.3, which was also characterized by lightning. There, Tacitus interpreted the omens to mean that the gods wished to punish the Roman people; here, the gods leave the temple amid images of fighting in the skies, implying that they are abandoning the Jews to their fate. Curiously, Tacitus says *deos*, not *deum*—*gods’* departure, not *god’s*—even though he explicitly mentioned in 5.5 that the Jews were strict monotheists.

Heubner (on 5.13.1) refers to the passage in Vergil (2.351 f.), where Aeneas urges his comrades to fight even in the face of the gods’ departure from the holy places: *excessere omnes adytis arisque relictis / di quibus imperium hoc steterat; succurritis urbi / incensae: moriamur et in media arma ruamus. / una salus victis nullam sperare salutem* (“Having left behind the shrines and altars, all the gods have departed for whom this empire had stood; you bring help to the burning city: let us die rushing into

the middle of battle. The one safety of the conquered is to hope for none"). Since "the departure of the gods" trope signifies "the destruction of the city," he argues that the plural represents an amalgam of the two and that Tacitus's plural must allude to this. However, Aeneas's exhortation to suicide amid the sack of his city also parallels the Jews' experience at the hands of the Romans. Though Tacitus does not describe it here, the destruction of city and Temple is imminent in the narrative. The gods are plural here because Tacitus prefigures that destruction and the enfolding of the Jewish God within the structure of Roman *religio* and its gods, in the manner of the *evocatio* ritual. The only comparandum, Josephus (6.300), does not mention "gods" but "thronged voice" (φωνῆς ἀθρόας) that says "we are leaving this place" (μεταβαίνομεν ἐντεῦθεν), a phrase that lacks the cultural significance of Vergil's and Tacitus's.

This scene exemplifies the process of *ingere/credere* enacted for us by Tacitus. Without the intervention of other focalizers or shifts to the realm of fantasy, he narrates not the *evocatio* and assimilation of the Jewish god but the imposition followed by the *evocatio* of Roman gods. That a Roman must conceive the ritual in this way is clear in Tacitus's definition of the hierarchy of religions: Egyptians worship animals and statues of half-human, half-animal beings, whereas Jews

mente sola unumque numen intellegunt: profanos, qui deum imagines mortalibus materiis in species hominum effingant; summum illud et aeternum neque imitabile neque interiturum. igitur nulla simulacra urbibus suis, nedum templis s<ist>unt; non regibus haec adulatio, non Caesaribus honor. (5.5.4)

understand the numen with their minds only, and as singular: they think those people impious, who make images of the gods with perishable materials in the forms of humans. Their god is the highest, eternal, inimitable, and imperishable. Therefore no statues stand in their cities, nor yet in their temples; they do not accord their kings this praise, nor Caesars this honor.

Romans therefore rank between Egyptians and Jews in their understanding of divinity: their gods are like humans, not beasts, but they do not make of their gods total abstractions, as do the Jews. The absolute belief of the Jews, represented in their "understanding" (*intellegunt*) of a god of whom they perceive only intellectually, not through any sense organ, threatens the *religio/superstitio* model that the Romans need in order to maintain control over the belief of the many. *Religio* reinforces obedience to secular law through the demand for proper attention to ritual.⁶⁵ By contrast, the Jews do not think it right to expiate *prodigia* either with victims

or vows, because they are a *gens superstitioni obnoxia, religionibus adversa* ("people addicted to *superstitio*, hostile to *religio*," 5.13.1), indicating that they are not liable to the kind of constraint *religio* can impose.

Roman ideology cannot assimilate the Jewish god without seriously compromising its own institutions of control, particularly as Judaism in fact originates in the close link between religion and law. When Moses brought his people out of Egypt to their own land, Tacitus relates, he prescribed practices grounded in their experience (e.g., avoiding pork because the pig was thought to harbor leprosy, the disease many suffered in Egypt) that regulated custom both sacred and profane (5.4.1–3). Such a link does not exist for the Romans; religion serves obliquely and symbolically to enforce obedience to the law. Tacitus therefore depicts the ritual of *evocatio* in reverse: Roman gods enter the shrine of the foreign god, overtake it, and are then called out again, obscuring the threat that it represents. Tacitus's narrative makes up the switch and simultaneously believes it.

So far, the narrative of the Jewish excursus has strenuously emphasized the difference between Jewish and Roman approaches to religion while arguing the superior nature of the latter. However, in asserting that the prophecies about world rulers coming from the East pertain not to the Jews but to Titus and Vespasian (5.13.2), Tacitus destroys the Roman barrier between belief in *prodigia* on the one hand and the *superstitio* of the people on the other. The governing class putatively controls belief engendered by the *superstitio* of the people and regulates it through rituals such as the expiation of *prodigia*, which the Jews do not do because they have no *religio*. When the Roman narrative voice arrogates this prophecy to itself, it accepts an article of *superstitio* as a matter of belief without the intervening regulative practice of *religio*, but it also does not explain why the Jews' conviction about the prophecy derives from *persuasio*, while the Romans' does not.⁶⁶ More generally, Tacitus implies that the whole Roman populace has been democratized under Caesar: everyone is now subject to a *superstitio* regulated only by him.

The ambiguity that Tacitus creates about the status of *superstitio* at 5.13 closes the parentheses that were opened by the description of the *praesagia* at 1.3 as *laeta tristia, ambigua manifesta*. That the prophecies throughout the *Histories* designate Vespasian and Titus *per ambages* suggests that the side of the prophecy you are on depends upon who is telling the story: thus determining who has *religio* and who *superstitio*. History may always be written by the winners, but Tacitus has a subtler understanding of the problem. The ultimate parallel that he draws between Jews and Romans is the significance and destruction of their respective temples (though we do

not have his account of the sack of Jerusalem, we can surely infer it from the preceding ethnography). Each is described as both a religious and a civil bulwark: the *maiores* built the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus as an assurance (*pignus*) of *imperium*; in Jerusalem, the temple is a *propugnaculum* (rampart, defense). The temples are the centers of religious faith expressed as the expectation of the success and longevity of their respective peoples. So long as the Romans fought for their country (*pro patria*), the temple stood. Tarquinius Superbus had dedicated it in the hopes of their future greatness, although at the time their means were only modest (3.72.2). But the Jews have taken to fighting one another, with warring leaders. One of them, John, sent a faction to kill Eleazarus, who controlled the Temple, under the pretext of going to sacrifice. This internecine strife continued until the arrival of the Romans, whereupon they joined forces against a common enemy (5.12).

The Jews therefore desecrate their holy place with war against one another just as the Romans do in the civil war between Vitellians and Flavians. And, like the Romans' temple, theirs will fall; it will not, however, be rebuilt as an ongoing symbol of their autonomy. The histories of the two temples therefore articulate the split between *religio* and *superstitio* that supports Roman ideology: we won, our temple will be rebuilt (with the loot from the destruction of the Jews'), and our practices therefore count as *religio*. What the Jews provide is an ideological rival for Rome, in whom localized practices and laws are gathered together under the rubric of a universal principle, namely, God. Such a principle is desirable for consolidating Roman hegemony, where the laws that Rome seeks to impose on its empire require centralization, most conveniently in the person of the emperor; this is surely what Augustus had in mind with the divinization of Julius Caesar. Hence the importance of believing that the gods have chosen the Flavians, and in the *fortuna* or *fatum* that attends them. It cannot be thought that accident brought them to power, or else there would be no reason to obey them instead of someone else. Jerusalem is the same but different; Rome must therefore banish the sameness that would threaten its own tradition. In so doing, it secures *religio* for itself and casts the demon of *superstitio* onto the Jews.

I have argued that Tacitus presents the ascent of Vespasian as a turning point in Roman ideology, where the emperor's authority was now viewed as a product of military influence governed by the favor of the gods. He therefore becomes an object of *superstitio* for all his subjects. In the Republic, the categories of *religio* and *superstitio* were kept in place by the lack of a religious focal point so that the ruling class could both disdain *su-*

perstitio as a means of asserting their sociopolitical power and profess it in the form of artistic or rhetorical elevation of Roman identity. On this contribution of religion to ideology, Samuel Romilly is worth quoting at length:

When I was at Paris, everything I saw convinced me that, independently of our future happiness and our sublimest enjoyments in this life, religion is necessary to the comforts, the conveniences, and even to the elegances and lesser pleasures of life. Not only I never met [*sic*] with a writer truly eloquent who did not, at least, affect to believe in religion, but I never met with one in whom religion was not the richest source of his eloquence. Cicero, sceptical as he is in his philosophical writings, in his orations always (except once or twice where it was his interest to shake the established faith of his country) appears to be a firm believer. He repeatedly invokes those "Dii immortales" who he knew did not exist, and is never perhaps so eloquent as where he adopts even all the absurdities of paganism: where, for instance, in his pleading for Milo, he attests the sacred hills and groves of Albania, its subverted altars, and the great Jupiter Latiaris, that they were roused to punish the infamous Clodius who had polluted all their holy rites; where, in his oration for Sextius, he invokes to his aid Jupiter Capitolinus, Juno, Minerva, and the Dii Penates, whose temples and shrines he had secured from destruction. . . . But the instances are innumerable where the eloquence of Cicero owes all its wonderful force to the fables, the errors, and the superstitious rites of heathenism.⁶⁷

But this system only exists when the power invested in secular and religious authority is fragmented, and the gods can be invoked either as symbols of individual civic functions, or as universal or rhetorical ideals. Cicero can choose whether to use the law of *religio* as a regulatory function of government or an inspirational medium. But the divinization of Julius Caesar unites these two in one (human) person, shutting down much of the poetic license that the old *religio* afforded. Now it is the emperor-god who acts as both *dii penates* and the embodiment of secular law, and using his divinity as a poetic subject makes tricky going. In the Republic, *fingere* and *credere* comprise two separate categories. Gods can be poetically or rhetorically invoked as ideals or ideological mainstays of government, but they need not inspire literal belief; indeed, although there was "little attempt . . . to destroy or repress un-Roman practices,"⁶⁸ the ones that were punished were those that did inspire such practices, such as those who administered drugs for magic or poisoning, or Pythagorean philosophers.

And the divinization of a mortal would be by its very nature an example of *superstitio*, as *religio* maintained a difference between men and gods.

Augustus's regime does not acknowledge the difference, employing a poetic term (*divus*) to refer to a made-up god, who nevertheless commands literal belief because of his very real association with contemporary politics.⁶⁹ No account is given of the coexistence of the poetic and the literal. This friction between the open and covert aspects of emperor-worship is resolved in the accession of Vespasian, whose command is ratified by law as the gift of his soldiers. When the emperor's power is officially recognized, so too is his divine status; hence the belief in stories about his miracles and *fortuna*.

Tacitus perceives the ramifications of this shift as the open coexistence of *fingere* and *credere*, which is why the false Nero incident (where he describes the followers as *fingentibus credentibusque*) follows directly upon the narrative of Titus's visit to Paphos at the beginning of book 2. What had been implicit in the late Republic and earliest Empire, though in different forms, becomes explicit. This change accounts for Tiberius's attitude toward the man who sold a statue of Augustus along with garden equipment on the one hand, and Trajan's toward the Christians on the other. Tiberius says that Augustus had not become a god to mete out punishment to his subjects (*Ann.* 1.73); that is, Tiberius does not officially recognize a coexistence of secular and religious power.⁷⁰ Trajan, by contrast, insists in his letter to Pliny that the one thing the Christians must do is worship "our gods," which would include a statue of himself (*Ep.* 10.97). This is not to say that all is revealed and the "ideological fantasy" is removed, but rather that its locus has shifted. Žizek illustrates this shift with the story of a crazy man who thinks he is a grain.⁷¹ At long last the doctors cure him, but shortly thereafter he rushes back into the asylum, terrified because he has just met a hen. "Calm down," they tell him, "you know now that you are not a grain." "Yes," replies the man, "but does the hen?" In the world of *superstitio* that Tacitus suggests he inhabits, reason is only preserved at the expense of locating the illusion elsewhere—in this case, with the Jews.

5 A Civil Disturbance

The Batavian Revolts

Julius Civilis's name is almost too good to be true. His revolt is at once a civil and foreign action against Rome, a combination Tacitus locates also in his character: *sed Civilis ultra quam barbaris solitum ingenio sollers et Sertorium se aut Annibalem ferens simili oris dehonestamento, ne ut hosti obviam iretur, si a populo Romano palam descivisset, Vespasiani amicitiam studiumque partium praetendit* ("But Civilis, clever beyond the usual scope of a barbarian and passing himself off as Sertorius or Hannibal by means of a similar facial disfigurement, in order not to incur attack as if he were an enemy, if he openly broke with the Roman people, alleged friendship for Vespasian and zeal for his faction," 4.13.2). Civilis's barbarism, a surface characteristic unlike his inner (civilized) intelligence, consists of "passing himself off" as one or other of Rome's famous former enemy. Since *se . . . ferens* recalls the action of an imposter (OLD 17), Civilis appears to play rather than be a barbarian; on the other hand, he also plays Vespasian's ally. From all angles, Civilis both is and is not assimilable as one of *us*.

In the first part of his essay "Of Cannibals," Montaigne inverts the usual meaning of the words "savage" and "barbarian" by associating them with the cruelty and artifice of civilization, although, as Michel de Certeau argues, he "is wary of not giving [them] another definition."¹ Montaigne linguistically displaces the figure of the Other, leaving the definition of "same" open to investigation. Similarly, Tacitus examines the degree to which Julius Civilis helps or harms the Roman state according to its ability to assign him a fixed identity. Because he is foreign, Civilis represents a conceptual space through which Vespasian must pass before consolidating his power. Although Vespasian accedes through civil war, he can be understood as "self" if the Batavian is "other." But Tacitus also understands

Civilis as the space that deconstructs the boundaries that separate “self” and “other,” simultaneously undermining Roman identity and authorizing the historian’s own narrative techniques that both distance the reader and draw him in.

In the figure of Civilis, the *Histories* locates the tension of Roman ideology as it prepares for the watershed of a new dynasty. Denise Grodzynski asserts that the beginning of the second century sees a change in the meaning of *superstitio* from “excessive beliefs or rituals,” which could plague any people or religion, to “other peoples’ religions.”² She rarely mentions Tacitus as a source, but if the interpretation I have made in this book is plausible, the extant portion of the *Histories* consists largely of an account of this change, which according to Tacitus comes even earlier, with the acclamation of Vespasian in July 69. Assuming that the *Histories* was composed in twelve books, and that the first hexad comprises the year 69 to the death of Vespasian,³ the Batavian revolt occupies a significant portion of the fourth book—that is, the first third of the whole.⁴ Though the first sorties were made as early as April of that year, Tacitus reserves the narrative of these operations for several reasons. First, as he tells us, news of the problems in Germany, including the defection of legions and the sack of several towns, did not immediately reach Rome, which in any case did not take them very seriously. That, and the desire not to further complicate the narrative of events leading up to the two battles of Cremona, contribute to the historian’s decision to hold back on the Batavian revolt.

However, within book 4 the revolt also closes the narrative of the Long Year and embraces that of senatorial affairs and the visit of Vespasian to the temple of Serapis in Alexandria, which, as I have argued, represents a turning point in public perception of the principate. If he heals the afflicted, the attending medical experts reassure Vespasian, he can take all the credit; if he fails to do so, it is the poor patients who will bear the ridicule for having *believed* that he could do so. Their assurance resembles the trick coin-toss “Heads I win, tails you lose” and expresses the ability of ideology always to defer what is inimical to it—namely, the idea that it is not the only “truth.” What Tacitus shows in this episode, with forty years or so of hindsight, is the change from free and individual belief policed by practice to a belief policed by power overt and absolute. The latter is not forced nor effected by propaganda, which is why Tacitus can say: “You can think what you want and say what you think” (1.1.4). Of course, what you think is now no longer any threat to the emperor. Even Helvidius Priscus had to work very hard to come by a martyr’s death, and we hear that Vespasian ultimately regretted his decision and tried to recall the executioners (Suet. *Vesp.* 16). The anxiety

about *superstitio*, a belief in something false, is relocated: if the marvelous occurs, it is arrogated as one's own belief, which though retrospective is seen to have been vindicated. Others' are empty, false.

The Jews are an easy target, and it would not suit the purpose of Tacitus's shadow history to take potshots. Nevertheless, they are useful to him precisely because they represent the antithesis of "Romanness," and therefore show up how easily others can be made to take out Roman trash. Much more delicate a problem is Julius Civilis and his status within the Roman order. At the beginning of the revolt, it looks for a while as if he acted on the orders of Vespasian to divert the armies of Germany from sending reinforcements to the Vitellians. Pro-Flavian history, to which Tacitus himself had some recourse, obscures the extent to which Vespasian solicited Civilis's help, but it is clear that at least one letter changed hands, from Vespasian's field-commander Antonius Primus to Hordeonius Flaccus, commander of the legions in Upper Germany.⁵ Until the outcome of the second battle of Cremona was known, it was not at all clear that the Batavians were not acting in concert with the Flavians: a period of some five months, between early April, when the first attacks were made by the Cannenfates against Roman strongholds on the lower Rhine, and October, when the Flavians beat the Vitellians and burned Cremona. Even when Civilis dropped the pretense and threw himself into open revolt, the long tradition of Batavian military aid that supplied the Roman army with some of its crack cohorts—and leaders, including Civilis's nephew Briganticus, who did not turn against the Romans and was killed fighting his own countrymen—gave the action a civil as well as foreign flavor.

As he does with the Jews, Tacitus often examines the Batavians in terms of their beliefs. At a time when Roman ideology fluctuates so drastically, everyone else's represents the challenge to provide a logic of differentiation. The central concern of the *Histories* is the rhetoric of this differentiation and its evolution from chaos, at the death of Nero, to order, at the accession of Vespasian. Much of what coalesces in the new Flavian paradigm is already present, though fragmented, in the Neronian. The appearance of the false Nero, directly after our introduction to the Flavians at the beginning of book 2, is our most important narrative clue to this evolution. Here, a public visits upon a stranger its desire both to fashion him into Nero, and believe that he *is* Nero. This impulse does not resemble the older model of deification and clearly exhibits *superstitio*, with the important addendum that the crowd takes the model of *figere*—that is, what happened at the deification of the Caesars—adds it to *credere*—namely, *superstitio*—and heaps the whole onto a living person. It is no accident that the incident

occurs in the East. From this realm of “them,” which Tacitus clearly indicates engages in *superstitio*, comes the paradigm for accepting Vespasian as emperor. The beliefs of the Batavians—their own version of the *fingere/credere* dichotomy—actually present the greatest threat to Rome because of their proximity, which makes differentiation harder than in the case of the Jews.

The manuscript of the *Histories* breaks off at the point where the Batavian revolt is over, but it is not hard to believe that the following books assumed a very different aspect than the one Tacitus employs for the civil war narrative. Indeed, the change begins even earlier, in book 4. Vitellius is dead, and the new year A.D. 70 brings Vespasian, already acclaimed as emperor for six months, toward a quiescent Rome. The arrival of Mucianus, amid mutterings over his high-handed communication with the Senate, causes some embarrassment: *ceterum invidia in occulto, adulatio in aperto erant: multo cum honore verborum Muciano triumphalia de bello civium data, sed in Sarmatas expeditio finge-batur* (“But hatred was kept hidden and flattery displayed. With a great deal of verbal pomp, triumphal honors were given to Mucianus for the civil war; but the excursion against the Sarmatians was made the excuse,” 4.4.2). This comment strips bare the rhetoric of the Senate’s relationship with the new regime. Mucianus’s triumph against the Sarmatians (and their Dacian neighbors) is not fictitious: he had diverted his march to Rome to come to the aid of Moesia, whose legions had been summoned for the second battle at Cremona and was undermanned for attacks by the tribes across the Danube (3.46). That his arrival was deliberate is indicated by the fact that Vespasian controlled the Mediterranean and Eastern provinces (2.83), making Mucianus’s most likely route a crossing from Dyrrachium and a trip north unlikely.⁶ But Tacitus narrates the arrival simultaneously as if it were deliberate and fortuitous:

iamque castra legionum excindere parabant, ni Mucianus sextam legionem opposuisset, Cremonensis victoriae gnarus, ac ne externa moles utrimque ingrueret, si Dacus Germanusque diversi inrupissent. adfuit, ut saepe alias, fortuna populi Romani, quae Mucianum viresque Orientis illuc tulit, et quod Cremonae interim transegimus. (3.46.2)

And they were even now preparing to burn the legionary camps, if Mucianus had not opposed them with the 6th legion, because he was ignorant of the victory at Cremona and in order that a mass not threaten on both sides, if the Dacians and Germans should stage a revolt in different places. The good luck of the Roman people was at

hand, as often at other times, to bring Mucianus and the strength of the East there, and because we meanwhile finished things off at Cremona.

As with Tacitus's description of the Jews, the narrative needs some unpacking. Two narrators emerge: first, an "objective" third-person informs the reader of the situation but recedes with the comment about the *fortuna* of Rome. *Ut saepe alias* is an emotive commentary that appears to belong to the "we" of *transeginimus*, indicating that the narrator has slipped into free indirect speech. Who is speaking here? Who is "we"? Tacitus gives us both the facts and an ideological spin on the facts: a Roman counteraction against foreigners is described as the special favor of some higher power. This focalizer, through whom the reader perceives the event with "our" "Roman" perception, identifies thoroughly with the Flavian cause; otherwise it would not be possible for "us" to understand the victory at Cremona as a stroke of fortune similar to Mucianus's defeat of the Dacians. With this in mind, we can return to the senators' reception of Mucianus and the strange phrasing of the reason attributed to the honors they accord him. "They gave him honors for the Sarmatian victory, but the civil war was the real reason" makes more immediate, even Tacitean sense: Mucianus had won that victory, so appearances are easily sustained, even if everyone knows that he must be acclaimed because of his role in the new regime. But Tacitus puts it the other way around, emphasizing that the honors are actually for the civil war, and calling the Sarmatian victory a fiction in comparison.

Despite the burning of the Capitol and Cremona by the Flavians, the credibility of their regime has already taken root. This dichotomy is embodied in the figure of Mucianus himself, who, although he is Vespasian's picked deputy, makes himself decidedly unpopular with the Senate. Again, Tacitus narrates in free indirect style, through which he conveys the Senate's perspective:

Miserat et Mucianus epistulas ad senatum, quae materiam sermonibus praebuere. si privatus esset, cur publice loqueretur? potuisse eadem paucos post dies loco sententiae dici. ipsa quoque insectatio in Vitellium sera et sine libertate; id vero erga rem publicam superbum, erga principem contumeliosum, quod in manu sua fuisse imperium donatumque Vespasiano iactabat. (4.4.1)

Mucianus also had sent a letter to the Senate, which provided fuel for commentary. If he was a private citizen, why was his dispatch public? He could have said the same things a few days later in the usual order of speaking. His repudiation of Vitellius had come too

late and without *libertas*; indeed his boast that *imperium* was in his power and gift for Vespasian was an outrage against the Republic and an insult to the princeps.

This passage directly precedes the statement on Mucianus's victory and indicates the ideological split that has occurred between acceptance of Vespasian's absolute power and protest against it; not least in the lack of distinction it makes between Mucianus's insults to *res publica* and *princeps*. The Senate raises some fuss over its treatment by Mucianus, but not Vespasian, from whom in the previous chapter it has received a letter that speaks *civilia de se et rei publicae egregia* ("modestly about himself and outstandingly about the Republic," 4.3.4). If Vespasian writes without knowledge that the civil war is over, his letter represents the communication of a general in the field that defers to the authority of the Senate. This gesture in itself parodies the relations between civil and military government, as Vespasian is a general in the field of a civil war which, when won, will confer the highest authority on the victor. The letter summarizes the old Augustan problem: how to rule and defer ruling at the same time. But Tacitus suggests that Vespasian did know the war was over: *addidere alacritatem Vespasiani litterae tamquam manente bello scriptae. ea prima specie forma; ceterum ut princeps loquebatur, civilia de se et rei publicae egregia* ("Vespasian's letter, written as if the war were still on, added [to the Senate's] zeal. That was how it looked at first glance. But he spoke like a princeps, modestly about himself and outstandingly about the Republic"). The tone that so pleases the Senate combines authority and deference; this, Tacitus tells us, is princeps-speak, and Vespasian knows the protocol for the occasion.⁷

The Senate is blind to these contradictions, because it has already begun to accord Vespasian divine status. Immediately prior to this section of the narrative, we discover that it has not only voted him "all the usual things" (a strangely open-ended decree), but it believes some extraordinary things about the civil war:

at Romae senatus cuncta principibus solita Vespasiano decernit, laetus et spei certus: quippe sumpta per Gallias Hispaniasque civilia arma, motis ad bellum Germaniis, mox Illyrico, postquam Aegyptum Iudaeam Syriamque et omnis provincias exercitusque lustraverant, velut expiato terrarum orbe cepisse finem videbantur.
(4.3.3)

But at Rome the senate voted Vespasian all things customary for *principes*. It was happy and confident: indeed, the civil war that started in Gaul and Spain, and had moved to the Germanies, then

Illyricum, after they had spread to Egypt, Judaea, Syria, and all the provinces and armies, seemed to have come to an end as if with the whole globe expiated.

The Senate's vote, which we know as the *lex de imperio Vespasiano*, contains a third clause that confers open-ended power upon the new princeps, including the right to select a deputy to act in his place.⁸ It has no precedents from previous regimes. In addition, we learn, again through free indirect speech, that it now views the civil war as a religious purification, which would make its victor some kind of avenging deity. Though absent himself, Vespasian's power possesses an authority different from that of previous Caesars. Paradoxically, the shift occurs because he fulfills the rules already implicit in the imperial game: whereas under the Julio-Claudians (with attenuating strength) the facade of republican rule maintained *religio*—ritual without belief—the explicit fact of autocracy under Vespasian elicits *superstitio*, or divinizing of the living power of the emperor. The Senate's treatment of Vespasian conflicts directly with the decisions to rebuild the Capitoline temple according to *religio*; nothing is to be changed, the old traditions are adhered to, and everything is accomplished strictly according to ritual. But the Senate defers deliberation on the subject until after the awarding of honors (4.4.3), whereas the usual procedure requires religious matters to be discussed first.⁹ Tacitus uses the phrase *mox deos respexere* ("Next they looked back at the gods") to describe their action. The sequence of proposals therefore moves from Mucianus's "false" triumph over the Sarmatians to the honors due to the gods, while the verb *respexere* underlines the belatedness with which the Senate treats this religious matter. The erasing of civil war connects the two: a foreign war is invented as a pretext for Mucianus's triumph, which, Tacitus states baldly, and quite without substantiation, was for victory in the civil one; and the Capitoline is to be restored as if it had suffered destruction at the hands of a foreign enemy, and as if its grand old republican heritage, which Tacitus rehearses for the reader at 3.72, had gone uninterrupted. No change is to be made, we discover later in this book, except a little to its height.

Forgetting the civil war that was responsible for both of these events takes pride of place in Tacitus's account of this session of the Senate. The problem is Mucianus. It is easier for the Senate to accept their new and absent leader, whose authority quickly establishes itself in the soil of *persuasio*, or believing in his supernatural qualities, than his deputy, whose presence is a concrete reminder of the avenues of power that accompany this new system. They do not resent Vespasian; they scapegoat Mucianus, who

speaks and acts in accordance with the actual circumstances. The Senate may not like it, but he does now have the right to send them letters; they themselves are about to ratify it. And his "boast" that *imperium* had been his to give Vespasian is no more than the truth, as we see at 2.77.1, where he galvanizes Vespasian to action at the same time as he openly declares his own fitness, but for childlessness, for the principate. The Senate also feels that his criticism of Vitellius is too late and shows no independence of thought (*sine libertate*, 4.41). This is a strange accusation, given that if he had criticized Vitellius any earlier he would have been in open revolt against the princeps; indeed, the criticism is only meaningful once Vitellius is dead and the new princeps's deputy offers it as an anodyne for the civil war. The Senate's feeling that Mucianus should have shown "independence" earlier is tantamount to sanctioning the civil war that it takes such pains to erase. Finally, the Senate maintains a spurious dichotomy between Republic and principate as it internally accuses Mucianus of arrogance toward the one and insolence toward the other. Surely he cannot be offering an insult to both at the same time: either the republican system still lives, in which case the princeps is an anomaly, or Vespasian is the princeps, and he and the state are coterminous. In short, it is not logically possible to insult both of these parties at the same time. But the Senate is as usual concealing the fact of absolute power behind the attempt to maintain the republican facade it knows from the Julio-Claudian era.

"US" VERSUS "THEM"

What makes Civilis such a threat is his status as both a civil and foreign foe; he embodies the problem facing the Romans of how to reestablish the boundaries of self and other after the trauma of civil war. Because he is himself a contender for *imperium*, in this year of civil war he is Vespasian's rival, not just an insubordinate subject. Inciting rebellion among the Batavians and their neighbors, he successfully offers them a vision of Roman imperial ideology as their own, although he proves to be the only one, Roman or barbarian, who understands its full implications. In a speech to the Gauls and Germanies after the initial phase of the rebellion (4.17), he emphasizes that the only reason Rome was able to crush Vindex in the Gallic rebellion of 68 was because the Gauls and Batavians had been divided from one another, and the Gauls even among themselves. If they combine their strengths, he assures them of success. He also reminds them of Arminius's defeat of Varus, a challenge presented not by Vitellius but Cae-

sar Augustus. Civilis impresses upon his listeners the need for their own empire in order to combat that of the Romans; he conjures both defeat and victory with images of imperial strength crushing provincial weakness, in the case of the former, and in the latter, provincial strength showing its mettle against the imperial bully. Both images demonstrate to Civilis's audience that empire is desirable and that they can have it if they want.

Civilis also appeals to his listeners' desire for freedom: *servirent Syria Asiaque et suetus regibus Oriens: multos adhuc in Gallia vivere ante tributa genitos . . . libertatem natura etiam mutis animalibus datam, virtutem proprium hominum bonum; deos fortioribus adesse* ("[He said:] 'Let Syria and Asia be slaves, and the Orient, which was used to kings: there were many still alive in Gaul who had been born before the imposition of tribute . . . even dumb animals had been given freedom by nature; courage was the special property of men. The gods helped the stronger side,'" 4.17.4). Here, Civilis holds out the promise of both freedom and empire, the latter implicit in his observation that strength is divinely sanctioned. Shortly thereafter, we see that the Germanies have adopted this view: *mox valescentibus Germanis pleraeque civitates adversum nos arma <sumpsere> spe libertatis et, si exuissent servitium, cupidine imperitandi* ("Soon, when the Germanies had grown in strength, several states took up arms against us in the hope of liberty, and, if they had thrown off slavery, the desire for empire," 4.25.3); then the Tencteri in their ultimatum to the Ubii after the victory at Cologne:

quo modo lucem diemque omnibus hominibus, ita omnes terras fortibus viris natura aperuit. instituta cultumque patrum resumite, abruptis voluptatibus, quibus Romani plus adversus subiectos quam armis malent. sincerus et integer et servitutis oblitus populus aut ex aequo agetis aut aliis imperitabit. (4.64.3)

Just as nature has opened light and day to all mankind, so has it opened all lands to the stronger. Take up again the practices and ways of your fathers, leaving off the pleasures with which the Romans prevail against their subjects more than by arms. Sound, whole, and forgetful of slavery, as a people you will live either the equals of others, or you will rule them.

This attractive combination resonates with Civilis's audience because it conforms to their idea of what makes Rome great, and could therefore do the same for themselves. But the combination of liberty and empire also belongs to Rome's vision of itself, the reality of which is intrinsically flawed. On the one hand, *libertas* signifies Republic, a time when freedom of speech

was guaranteed. Paradoxically, Caesar's conquest of Gaul—a great stride in the acquisition of empire—established the conditions for the Republic's demise. But Roman ideology does not recognize the mutual exclusivity of *libertas* and empire, a blind spot that Tacitus briefly and startlingly reveals in Agricola's regrets about Ireland. As I argued in chapter 3, Agricola recognizes the loss of *libertas* everywhere except Rome; there is no irony in what he tells his son-in-law, although irony certainly glosses the latter's repetition of it. On the other hand, freedom from Oriental-style monarchy is a keynote of Roman imperial ideology that reinscribes the Roman constitution as a combination of freedom and imperialism. On both counts, Civilis extends to his audience the possibility—indeed the desirability—of being just like the Romans, and achieving what they have achieved.

When Civilis encourages his audience not to be slaves, the type of government he evokes is not Roman, but that of an Oriental monarchy. By implicitly equating provincials with slaves here at the beginning of the Batavian revolt narrative (and more or less the beginning of book 4), he also merges Roman and Oriental. At the end of the book, Tacitus spells out clearly the Oriental connection in the narrative of Vespasian's accession, which has all the trappings of an Eastern-style monarchy. Civilis thus reveals to his audience the elements of imperial ideology, including the direction they are heading; but they only partly understand this narrative. Civilis himself understands it all, including the fact that an empire always has a leader, and that in this case it could be himself: *sic in Gallias Germaniasque intentus, si destinata provenissent, validissimarum ditissimarumque nationum regno imminebat* ("In this way he fixed upon the Gauls and Germanies; if destiny should have worked out, he would have been bent upon a kingdom of the strongest and richest nations," 4.17.6).

Tacitus thus delivers the Romans' image of themselves succinctly but indirectly, in the speech of a foreigner who thinks like both an insider and an outsider to the Roman system. Civilis is more Roman than Roman: his own ascent depends upon the blindness to monarchy intrinsic in imperial ideology. His desire for empire and rule bears out Tacitus's observation that the lust for power comes to humans as the natural consequence of empire (2.38). Tacitus tracks the development of this passion from early republican times on, prompted by previous historians' opinion that the Vitellian and Othonian armies might have made peace independently of their leaders:

Invenio apud quosdam auctores, pavore belli seu fastidio utriusque principis, quorum flagitia ac dedecus apertiore in dies fama noscebantur, dubitasse exercitus, num posito certamine vel ipsi in

medium consultarent, vel senatui permetterent legere imperatorem, atque eo duces Othonianos spatium ac moras suasisse. (2.37.1)

I find in certain authors that either because of fear of the war or distaste for both *principes*, whose criminality and shamelessness became daily the subject of more open conversation, the army hesitated as to whether they should abandon the fight and consult among themselves, or let the Senate choose an emperor. To this end, the Othonian leaders had advised a delay.

Tacitus concedes that a few men might have privately hoped for peace and a good emperor (*ego, ut concesserim . . .*) but thinks that their leader, Suetonius Paulinus, could not possibly have believed the majority would have given up: *ita neque Paulinum . . . sperasse corruptissimo saeculo tantam volgi moderationem reor* ("By the same token I do not think that Paulinus . . . had hoped that in this most corrupt age there would exist such moderation in the crowd," 2.27.2). One external focalizer expresses the faint possibility of accord, whereas two focalizers, one external and one internal, authorize a narrative of corruption. The "certain authors" assume that the soldiers, if left to themselves, would have handed over to the Senate the choice of emperor; that is, they would have acted according to more republican principles. But Tacitus objects that they were too different in language and character to reach such a consensus, while their leaders were too conscious of their own crimes to have desired or allowed for an honest emperor. This refutation of his predecessors' opinion leads him to explain that at no time did anyone possess "republican" motives (2.38): men have always had an innate love of power that erupted as soon as the conquest of empire began, for equanimity was possible only when Rome's means were modest: *Vetus ac iam pridem insita mortalibus potentiae cupido cum imperii magnitudine adolevit erupitque; nam rebus modicis aequalitas facile habebatur* (2.38.1). Both ends of the social hierarchy, Marius from the plebs and Sulla the aristocracy, exhibit the drive for *dominatio*; finally Pompey introduces the kind of struggle that aims for one thing only: *principatus*. Tacitus mentions Pompey and not Caesar because Caesar had dropped the facade of republicanism, whereas Pompey disguised the motivation for a struggle that was "more hidden, not better" (*occultior, non melior*) than Marius's and Sulla's. Like the legions of Otho and Vitellius before Cremona, Pompey's do not stand down at Pharsalus or Philippi: *non discessere ab armis in Pharsalia ac Philippis civium legiones, nedum Othonis ac Vitellii exercitus sponte posituri bellum fuerint* ("The armies of citizens did not leave off their arms at Pharsalus or Philippi; much less would the armies of Otho and Vitellius stop the war of their own accord," 2.38.2).

Pompey, Marius, and Sulla exhibit little difference from their imperial successors, except that the three “republicans” had *legiones civium*, whereas Otho and Vitellius have *exercitus*.

Tacitus estimates that the love of imperial power always already exists. Man’s “innate love” of it negates the possibility that Rome ever had *aequalitas*; as in the personality of Tiberius, the sickness was just waiting to emerge. Yet in the Romans this love was revealed through the rise and fall of individuals and institutions, a historical process that Civilis wants to bypass. He aims straight for *dominatio* without the mediation of Republic. In his struggle against them, the Romans encounter a fast-forwarded version of their own history, an embodiment of their own alienation from themselves that they must resolve in their negotiation of the new principate.

Tacitus reiterates the problem of identity in the speech of Dillius Vocula. Encamped outside Novaesium, many of Vocula’s soldiers turn traitor and secretly swear allegiance to the Gallic forces of the defectors, Julius Classicus, head of the Treviran cavalry unit, and Julius Tutor, commander of the left bank of the Rhine. Vocula, by now unpopular, parades his troops and admonishes them, emphasizing the dissolution of boundaries between Roman and barbarian that they are effecting by their treachery:

an, si ad moenia urbis Germani Gallicque duxerint, arma patriae inferetis? horret animus tanti flagitii imagine. Tutorine Treviro aguntur excubiae? signum belli Batavus dabit? et Germanorum catervas supplebitis? quis deinde sceleris exitus, cum Romanae legiones contra derexerint? transfugae e transfugis et proditores e proditoribus inter recens et vetus sacramentum invidi deis errabitis?(4.58.5)

Or, if the Germans and Gauls should lead you to the walls of Rome, will you bear arms against your country? The mind recoils from the idea of such evil. Will you take up the watch for Tutor the Treviran? Will the Batavian give the signal for war? And will you fill out the German throngs? What end of wickedness will there be, when the Roman legions deploy against you? Turncoats fleeing turncoats, and traitors fleeing traitors, will you waver, hateful to the gods, between your old and new oath?

Vocula refers to the Roman legions that his own will flee as “turncoats” because many of them have already demonstrated their infidelity to Rome: this is a war in which even long-standing Roman allies seize their chance, at least for a while, to overthrow Roman hegemony and establish their own. Vocula’s strategy, here as in the previous chapter where he protests that Rome is still strong, is to emphasize the difference between “us” and “them,” and encourage his men to identify with the right group. In his ear-

lier reflection on the insolence of Classicus and Tutor (4.57), he adduces as support for Rome “imperial destiny and avenging gods” (*fortunam imperii et ultores deos*). Divine support is apparently promiscuous, as both the rebel alliance and the Romans claim it for themselves: as well as Civilis’s claim that the gods help the stronger, the Gauls believe that the burning of the Capitoline demonstrates divine anger against the Romans (4.54.2). Focalized through Roman lenses, the Gauls’ belief simply indicates the idle superstition (*vana superstitione*) propagated by the Druids, but Vocula is completely serious when he uses the gods’ favor as an argument to rally his men.

Vocula’s examples of the gods’ vengeance on behalf of the Romans are the revolts of the Sacrovir (A.D. 21) and of Vindex (A.D. 68). These are two rather unfortunate examples, as Tacitus tells us in the *Annals* that Sacrovir’s revolt was almost welcomed by the Senate as an alternative to the government of Tiberius, while the fact that Tiberius carried on with the *delationes* led many to ask ironically whether Sacrovir was to appear before the Senate for treason (3.44). Vindex, for his part, was responsible for instigating civil war that nearly destroys Rome. These two men represent the precarious nature of Rome’s claim to *imperium*. If Vocula wanted victims of divine justice that favors the Romans, he could surely have found better examples than these. But the gods that Vocula seems to have in mind are Julius Caesar and Augustus: *melius divo Iulio divoque Augusto notos eorum animos: Galbam et infracta tributa hostiles spiritus induisse* (“Their [the Gauls’] tempers were better known to the Divine Julius and Augustus: Galba had endowed them with hostile impulses when he had lightened up on taxation,” 4.57.2). So these gods are actually Romans who know how to subdue an enemy, whereas Galba makes the mistake of allowing the enemy privileges too close to home. In a final twist of imperial logic, Vocula declares that the Treviri and Lingones are enemies at the moment because their slavery is easy to bear; but when they have been plundered and despoiled they will be friends (*nunc hostes, quia molle servitium; cum spoliati exutique fuerint, amicos fore*). This assertion again reminds us of Calgacus the Briton in *Agricola* 30, who observes the “false names” of imperial logic to which Vocula is blind, though Tacitus has the latter unwittingly state them quite clearly: enemies are those whom we treat as friends, and friends those we treat as enemies. Letting someone get too close through favors and lax discipline is dangerous, and the “avenging gods” that Rome has on its side are military dictators who know how to divide Roman from barbarian and legitimate *imperium* for themselves.

Immediately after his speech, Vocula is murdered by a henchman of

Classicus. The latter, claiming royal lineage and among his ancestors “more enemies of Rome than allies” (4.55.1), boasts in this way of the difference between himself and the Romans in order to inspire confidence in himself as a leader of the Gallic rebellion. After Vocula’s death, however, he enters the camp wearing the insignia of the Roman Empire (*sumptis Romani imperii insignibus in castra venit*) and can find nothing to say other than to administer an oath to the Gallic empire (*iuravere qui aderant pro imperio Galliarum*, 4.59.2). In these actions, Tacitus shows us the old model of empire that collapsed during the successive principates of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius because, having been acclaimed by the armies, these *principes* did not know how to sustain their rule.¹⁰ Unlike Vespasian, their negotiation of takeover is incomplete, their power neither concealed, like the Julio-Claudians’, nor overt. Classicus is behind the times. He adopts an outmoded style of usurpation, which leaves him speechless in the face of success. In this chapter, then, we see the same dynamic of separation that governs Roman rhetoric lent to the enemy, who, just like the Romans, mistake their own individuality. Classicus and the Gauls provide a mirror of the changes in Roman *imperium*: their actions fully demonstrate the degree to which it has penetrated and been assimilated by the provinces. *Imperium* is a two-way street, not a mythical item peculiar to Rome.

For the Romans, everything depends upon being able to make a distinction between themselves and the barbarians that legitimates Roman rule.¹¹ That Tacitus signals this distinction in the speeches of various characters, notably Civilis’s and Vocula’s, allows us a bird’s-eye view of Roman self-misrepresentation without the narrator himself becoming an external focalizer; he does not remove himself from the picture. Tacitus achieves a similar effect with changes in narrative focalization that do not involve the speech of other characters. Using variants of the pronoun *nos*, he signals a shift from his own analytical discourse into that of “Roman-speak,” whose gaps and self-contradictions the rest of the narrative illustrates by contrast. *Nos* and its variants are not interchangeable with *Romani* in the *Histories*; they reflect ideological boundaries. They occur relatively infrequently, excepting those found in *oratio recta*, and the preponderance are in book 4, where the stakes for dividing “us” from “them” are highest. While Tacitus frequently uses variants of *Romani* in the narrative, where he wishes to signal an ideological distinction he uses the pronoun instead; so, for example, when he describes how Germany and Gaul hope for liberty and empire, he remarks on their initial liberality in providing recruits for the *res Romana* but says that they took up arms against “us”: *motusque Bonna exercitus in coloniam Agrippinensem, adfluentibus auxiliis Gallorum, qui*

primo rem Romanam enixe iuvabant: mox valescentibus Germanis pleraeque civitates adversum nos arma <sumpsere> . . . ("The army at Bonn was moved up to Cologne, with Gallic auxiliaries pouring in, who at first strenuously supported the Roman cause. Soon, when the Germanies became stronger and several states took up arms against us . . .," 4.25.3). The contrast between *Romana* and *nos* emphasizes the difference between the barbarians' adherence to the demands of Roman *imperium* and their desire to have such a thing themselves. When a rival cause threatens the justification for Roman rule, a rhetoric of separation—"us" versus "them"—is needed in order for their cause to look different and inferior. By contrast, when things are quiet, they are all subsumed under "the Roman affair."

The next chapter presents a different case. The (Roman) troops lose heart because of a drought that makes the Rhine virtually unnavigable. Tacitus remarks: *apud imperitos prodigii loco accipiebatur ipsa aquarum penuria, tamquam nos amnes quoque et vetera imperii munimenta desererent: quod in pace fors seu natura, tunc fatum et ira dei vocabatur* ("Among those ignorant of the place, the very scarcity of water was understood in the place of an omen, as if the streams and ancient fortifications of empire were deserting us. In peacetime, this was called chance, or nature; then, it was fate and the anger of the gods," 4.26.2). "We" again signals Roman insecurity, since the Rhine, an important imperial boundary marker and method of transportation, has suddenly become a foe. As with relations between Romans and their *civitates*, which are naturalized into the *res Romana* when all is well, the Rhine is taken for granted in times of peace but turns against "us" when the going gets tough. Unlike the previous use of *nos*, with which Tacitus expresses an ideological distortion necessary to protect the supremacy of Roman identity, this division of self from other in a time of crisis reveals the criminal aspect of empire expressed through the guilt that prompts the soldiers' belief in fate and the anger of heaven. This guilt represents the other side of the worship of Vespasian: his open acclamation by the army and overt status as a military general engenders both extremes of *superstitio*.

Tacitus also uses *nos* when he narrates, rather elliptically, the problems in Britain. According to him, Queen Cartimandua had abandoned her consort, Venutius, in favor of another.¹² When Venutius, leader of the anti-Roman faction of the Brigantes, rebelled, Cartimandua was forced to summon Roman aid. Though she herself was saved, Venutius took over the kingdom, making the once-friendly state hostile. Petilius Cerialis would later incorporate it (*Agr.* 17.1). Tacitus expresses this struggle in terms of "Venutius" and "us": *et cohortes alaeque nostrae variis proeliis exemere*

tamen periculo reginam; regnum Venutio, bellum nobis relictum ("Our cohorts and cavalry regiments saved Cartimandua from danger in battles fought with varying success. The kingdom was left to Venutius; to us, the fighting," 3.45.2). The apparant martyrdom of this remark, and the division of *regnum* from *bellum*, belies the fact that the Romans, like Venutius, want the former and are willing to engage in the latter to achieve it. In the *Agricola*, Tacitus leaves us in no doubt as to the glory of Cerialis's achievement in subduing and annexing this state: *multa proelia, et aliquando non incruenta; magnamque Brigantium partem aut victoria amplexus est aut bello* ("There were many battles, sometimes bloody; he contained the great part of Brigantium with victory or war," *Agr.* 17.1). In the *Histories*, however, the Roman claim to *imperium* in Britain is naturalized by the distinction of the Other, embodied in Venutius and the term *regnum*, from "us," whom Tacitus portrays as ready to fight for an ally.¹³

EPRIUS MARCELLUS AND PETILIUS CERALIS ON *LIBERTAS* AT HOME AND ABROAD

These three examples demonstrate the larger use of *nos* that Tacitus makes in the *Histories*.¹⁴ However, it is in the speech of Cerialis to the Treviri and Lingones (4.73–74) that Tacitus gives the concept full and direct attention. Cerialis appeals to these tribes' ancient loyalty to Rome and the benefits they have derived from that association. He warns them against allowing Civilis and the Germans too much latitude in Gallic provinces, reminds them that Rome has always protected them, and advises them not to turn themselves over to new rulers now. Keitel (1993) suggests that this speech contributes to the oscillating themes of *libertas* and *servitus* in book 4.¹⁵ According to her interpretation, Tacitus examines the inflections of freedom and slavery in the foreign and domestic narratives, as both express the struggle over the acquisition, maintenance, and even significance of *imperium*. The speech of Cerialis has two major functions: to demonstrate the uses of the term *libertas* with which Civilis and the Germans have been trying to win their support, and to argue for the Romans as better masters. Keitel notes the naïveté of taking the speech absolutely at face value when it is surely intended as a critique of Roman imperialism, but she counters this observation with Cerialis's "frankness about the weakness of Roman rule. He asks the Gauls to bear with the *luxum vel avaritiam dominantium* (74.2) and thus repeats the same phrase with which Tacitus had described the Roman misconduct that had set off the revolt in the first place . . .

(14.1)." In the end, she argues that Cerialis's speech closes a parentheses opened by Marcellus at 4.8.2, when the latter remarks that he "prays for good emperors, but takes them as they come."

While these observations about the parallel structures of foreign and domestic *libertas* and *servitus* do much to illuminate the structure of the book as a whole, they stop short of explaining the relationship between the two. If, as Keitel convincingly argues, Tacitus describes a movement at Rome from *libertas*, albeit chaotic, to *principatus* that looks like *servitus*; and in Gaul from *libertas*, at the beginning of the revolt, to *servitus* at the hands either of Germany or of Rome, what does the one have to do with the other? If the relationship is mimetic, what does Tacitus achieve with it? It may be that he uses both venues to explore "the limits of freedom," but the differences between them are not only in scope, as Keitel suggests. This is a foreign as well as a civil war, which is why tricky questions such as the definition of freedom and slavery can be deferred, or offloaded, from "us" onto "them." This is not possible in Marcellus's speech to the senators, which may account for the fact that it is in *oratio obliqua*, and therefore does not say *nos*; whereas Cerialis's to the Treviri and Lingones is the *oratio recta* of a Roman to barbarians and uses variants of *nos* at crucial junctures.

It may be that many of the similarities between Gaul and Rome in this account are overt, but perhaps only from a historical distance. These speeches are sure statements of contemporary Roman ideology, and their significance would not be so accessible to someone living within the system. Keitel alerts the reader to the dubious sincerity of Cerialis's rhetoric at certain points, but she abandons her investigation with a *caveat lector*. Her conclusion assumes a logic in his and Marcellus's speech that we may take at face value, but the reality may be more complex: both speakers present in good faith cases that lack internal logic, and the heart of the matter lies in the slippage between the two. In both cases, the framing of the speech compromises its content. In his objection to Helvidius Priscus's demand that the best senators be chosen as a delegation to Vespasian, Marcellus tells a dark truth about contemporary Senate-emperor relations but does so within the context of upholding a traditional ritual to justify his own criminal record. He soon contradicts himself when he says that he remembers and admires the past but adheres to the demands of the present (*se meminisse temporum, quibus natus sit, quam civitatis formam patres avique instituerint; ulteriora mirari, praesentia sequi*, 4.8.2): that is to say, that past is gone forever. The heart of the speech, however, deals more with the position of senators within the principate than his own desire to be

chosen for the delegation to Vespasian. Without accusing them too sharply, he indicates that the Senate was as responsible for the delations as he himself, or that finally Nero's savagery had made fools and culprits of them all: *Non magis sua oratione Thraseam quam iudicio senatus adflictum; saevitiam Neronis per eius modi imagines inlusisse* ("[He said that] Thrasea had not suffered from his own speech any more than from the judgment of the Senate; the savagery of Nero had played tricks through fantasies of this kind," 4.8.3).

This attitude evokes the closing remarks of the *Agricola*, where Tacitus incriminates himself along with the whole Senate for the death of Priscus and others: *mox nostrae duxere Helvidium in carcerem manus...* ("Thereafter our hands dragged Helvidius to prison," etc.). *Agricola* may have been a worthy man, but his death reveals the stakes of Tacitus's writing. This is an angry passage, even if, as I argued in chapter 3, the co-responsion of Domitian's blush and the senators' pallor complicate the polarization of guilt and innocence. But Tacitus resents his father-in-law, the model empire-builder, for escaping and leaving to others the job of participating in such crimes: *Tu vero felix, Agricola, non vitae tantum claritate, sed etiam opportunitate mortis* ("You were lucky not only in the illustriousness of your life but also the timeliness of your death," 45.3). *Agricola* is like Cerialis in the sense that he does his job for the government without reflecting upon the justice of it; upon his death, Tacitus says, he makes a gift of innocence to the princeps: *constans et libens fatum excepisti, tamquam pro virili portione innocentiam principi donares* ("Unwaveringly and willingly you took up your fate, as if giving innocence to the princeps as the courageous share"). It is a double-edged compliment, as, on the one hand, *Agricola* had indeed done no wrong (i.e., made the princeps a gift of his own innocence), and, on the other, had vindicated the princeps by upholding the precepts of *imperium* as a good soldier ("as if giving innocence to the princeps *instead* of the courageous share"; i.e., resistance). Marcellus's speech tells a similar truth about the parceling out of guilt and implies that under such a system the *delatores* are not really a class of specially evil people so much as of those to whose lot it falls to do the dirty work. His own friendship with Nero, he says, was no less a source of anxiety to him than other peoples' exiles were to them. Priscus can play the republican martyr, but he, Marcellus, knows that he is just one of a whole Senate that is a slave just like him (*se unum esse ex illo senatu, qui simul servierit*, 4.8.3).

These words ring particularly true in light of Tacitus's own self-incrimination and also illuminate his assertion that there can be good men under

bad emperors (Agr. 44), which is most often understood as an exculpation of Agricola for a certain passivity under Domitian's tyranny. It depends, however, on what "good" means in this context. Agricola may be a dutiful and patriotic soldier, but he also does not understand the damage he does to the *libertas* of his own country by fighting to destroy it in another. But Tacitus wishes to condemn his father-in-law less than to use him as a model of the general acquiescence that *imperium* brings about. As Marcellus suggests in the *Histories*, one prays for good emperors, but even the best welcome some limit to *libertas*: *quo modo pessimis imperatoribus sine fine dominationem, ita quamvis egregiis modum libertatis placere* (4.8.4–5).

This observation colors Tacitus's description of the state of affairs under Nerva and Trajan at *Histories* 1.1 ("You are allowed to think what you want, and say what you think") and at *Agricola* 3.1, where he praises Nerva for having mingled *res olim dissociabiles: principatum ac libertatem* ("things long incompatible: principate and liberty"). Ch. Wirszubski's description of the term *libertas* as "personal and civic rights, or Republicanism, or both" illustrates the necessity of context for determining its nuance.¹⁶ Marcellus appears to mean both, as both would be invidious to autocracy. Tacitus strikes a more positive note, but only to emphasize that *libertas* has been defanged by the confidence that absolute power both feels and inspires.¹⁷ In other words, censorship designates power that has something to hide—Augustus was the first to burn a book—and therefore repress, but the emperors of Tacitus's time of writing do not face the same problems that confronted autocracy since Augustus.¹⁸ From Trajan on, the threat comes from the steadily encroaching barbarian, and the emperors are out at the front. Acquiescence to their authority is no longer an issue at home; it has become internalized, like the freedom of thinking and speaking that Tacitus describes.

The very ability to praise Agricola, which entails condemning Domitian, might be understood as the expression of this *libertas*. But Tacitus presents a less optimistic possibility in his own confession of guilt at the end of that text, which brings to light the worst of the principate's crime: that it implicates everybody. The parting words of his tribute can be understood as a melancholy continuation of this confession, as he admonishes Agricola's widow and daughter not to remember the man's outward form or even its bronze image so much as his soul: *id filiae quoque uxori praeceperim, sic patris, sic mariti memoriam venerari, ut omnia facta dictaque eius secum revolvant, formamque ac figuram animi magis quam corporis complectantur* ("I would enjoin upon his daughter and wife thus

to revere the memory of a father and husband by thinking about all his deeds and words, and embrace the form and figure of his soul more than of his body," 46.3). For the soul, he says more generally, does not reside in simulacra, but in "your very own character" (*forma mentis aeterna, quam tenere et exprimere non per alienam materiam et artem, sed tuis ipse moribus possis*). With the change of pronoun, Tacitus stops addressing the wife and daughter and reflects more generally upon his father-in-law's bequest both to him and to the rest of the living; namely, the attitude of empire that makes him and all his contemporaries guilty in some degree of all its crimes. His valediction is to Agricola as *superstes*, one who will live on because he has been "narrated and handed on" (*narratus et traditus*) by Tacitus (46.4). In this way Tacitus links up the end and the beginning, where he describes those who outlived Domitian as *pauci et, ut ita dixerim, non modo aliorum sed etiam nostri superstites sumus* ("we few survivors not only of others, but also, so to speak, of ourselves," 3.2) and mentions the danger incurred by Rusticus and Senecio for praising Paetus and Priscus during his tyranny. Domitian tried to burn their memories by burning the records of them and punishing those who extolled them, and indeed the predicament of those who would be virtuous under this regime seems grim. But although it was not possible to voice dissent and survive, memory holds out the possibility for reviving virtue—for "outliving oneself"—under the new *libertas* of Nerva: "We *should* have lost memory itself as well as voice, if it were as easy to forget as to keep silent" (*memoriam quoque ipsam cum voce perdidissemus, si tam in nostra potestate esset oblivisci quam tacere*).

By the end of the *Agricola*, then, Tacitus revives memory in the form of a text that does not run the risk of destroying its author or of being destroyed itself. Rusticus and Senecio, evoked at both the beginning and the end, were not so lucky, and it is their memory as well as Agricola's that the story of *Agricola* can preserve. But Agricola is a survivor, a *superstes*, among those who have "outlived themselves" also in the sense that the divisiveness of empire remains even when the emperor appears to have reconciled the irreconcilable. Agricola's virtue is ignorance, which makes voice and memory redundant, since ignorance apprehends no flaw of which to be critical. In the first place, he wished to study philosophy, which together with rhetoric had been the downfall of his father under Caligula (4.1).¹⁹ His mother having dissuaded him, he decides to pursue military distinction (5), also dangerous in the unstable age of empire. For Tacitus, Agricola represents the imperial subject who evades the guilt incumbent upon the rest who see and understand: he is a good man, but he is also the unwitting

product and perpetuator of the destruction of *libertas*, both outside and inside the system.

Agricola was given his first opportunities by Cerialis, who was appointed as governor of Britain when Agricola was commanding the 20th legion. The connection is instructive in light of Cerialis's speech to the Treviri and Lingones, which dramatizes the qualities embodied in Tacitus's vision of his father-in-law. To begin, Cerialis asserts that his Gallic audience has more respect for words than for the true nature of things: they judge good and bad according to the former. The implication that they have no knowledge of the latter will become important in due course. He also says that they (*vobis*) will benefit more from hearing his words than "we" (*nobis*) will from saying them. He maintains that the Romans did not force their way into Gaul (*ingressi sunt duces imperatoresque Romani nulla cupidine*) but were invited in order to stem internal dissent; this was not a maneuver to defend Italy but to stop a conqueror like the German Ariovistus from subjugating them. This assertion is suspect: why else would the Romans want to stop an alliance of Germans and Gauls if not to defend their own border? Cerialis asks if they think the Germans will be any less greedy than Ariovistus for rich Gallic soil (*eadem semper causa Germanis transcendendi in Gallias, libido atque avaritia . . .*); in other words, German motivation, unlike Roman, is impure. He then makes the famous proclamation that no one ever tried to enslave anyone else without using the term "liberty" and other specious names as a pretext (*ceterum libertas et speciosa nomina praetexuntur; nec quisquam alienum servitium et dominationem sibi concupivit, ut non eadem ista vocabula usurparet*).

This statement signifies on several levels. First, it fairly obviously refers to Rome as well as Germany, whether Cerialis knows it or not, and he does not. We infer this from his reference in the next sentence to *nostrum ius*, which brought peace to Gaul, and then to the *ius victoriae*, according to which Rome imposed upon it only so much military power and taxation as was necessary to keep the peace. If *ius victoriae* is the ultimate arbitrator, the issue is *imperium*, however strongly Cerialis contends that the Romans, unlike the Germans, do not impose this on their "allies." This example of self-contradiction occurs exactly halfway through the speech; it is a moment of crisis that represents the self-contradictory nature of the principate and the epistemology proper to it. Essentially, Cerialis's argument is a recapitulation of the Augustan settlement: in order to have *libertas*, *imperium* must exist; but with *imperium* comes a cancellation of *libertas*, as Keitel points out.²⁰ The epistemology of the principate is an ongoing attempt to erase the cancellation; hence Cerialis's remarks, which provide a

perfectly sound description of the need for arms to establish peace, but skirt logical analysis of the hierarchy of power that results from such an intervention.

Erasure demands self-justification, a need that proves to be the weakest link in the ideological armor. When Cerialis arrives at the heart of Roman rule, the *principes* themselves, he admits to the Gauls that bad emperors do exist and that Romans have to put up with them as well. He describes the vices of bad emperors as *luxus* and *avaritia*, two motivations that he has just argued Rome does not have for imposing *imperium* upon Gaul. Keitel suggests that this exemplifies Cerialis's honesty, as a counterbalance to the ambiguity of the remarks about *libertas*, but she does not suggest a motivation for this counterbalancing effect. The contradiction between these two sections of the argument highlights it as ideologically significant. In the face of his admission about Roman emperors, Cerialis's argument founders: why should foreigners submit themselves to a corrupt system that has no inherent justice or logic? What would they have to lose by throwing in their lot with the Germans? In fact, Cerialis's earlier remarks on choosing the right master make a great deal of sense; it is no doubt true that as *domini* go, Romans are preferable to Germans, as the Batavians themselves admit at 5.25. Monty Python's *Life of Brian* demonstrates this truth of empire in the scene where the Judaeen People's Front holds a clandestine anti-Roman meeting in Jerusalem. John Cleese's character makes an impassioned speech against the "Roman pigs," ending by demanding: "What have the Romans ever done for you?" The joke is that one after another, his audience mentions benefits the Romans have brought, such as roads, sewage systems, education. In the end Cleese is forced to say: "All right, but *apart* from . . . [long list] . . . what have the Romans ever done for you?"

The truth of the scene, which is what makes it funny, is that the Romans are conquerors who impose their own system of control on this foreign people. But they also confer goods such as those mentioned, and the disjunction between the two engenders humor. Cerialis is asking the question the other way around—"What have the Romans *not* done for you?"—to which there is only one answer that he cannot admit: "They have not given us *libertas*." But Cerialis has in fact already addressed the problem himself. If those who wish to dominate always use the term *libertas*, which he classes with "specious names," then it must no longer exist. This is perhaps the truest thing he says, although he does not know it, and this disjunction admits of a great deal more complexity than what Ronald Martin calls "a plausible account of the face of Roman imperialism" and "an oversimpli-

fied picture."²¹ Cerialis tries to profess no difference between Romans and their conquered people by reminding them that they command their own legions within the Roman army, govern their own provinces, and in general share everything equally. Syme calls these "pleas of dubious validity" and about Gallic generalship of Roman legions comments that it "cannot have been normal."²² He also adduces Julius Vindex as the only example of a Gallic governor (of Lugdunensis, in 68). Cerialis therefore stretches the truth to breaking point in the attempt to reason both that the Romans have a right to rule and that they do not rule but rather "keep the peace," while these professions of equality vanish in the face of *nostrum ius*. Either there is equality or there are "we" and "they," but not both simultaneously.

However, Syme also compares Cerialis's version of Roman *imperium* with Avitus's at *Annals* 13.56. Boiocalus, a member of the Ampsivarii who have colonized Frisian land without the permission of Rome, appeals to Avitus, the Roman commander sent to expel him and his people. He mentions his own service to Rome and the crime of letting empty fields go to waste while allies of Rome starve. Finally, he addresses the sun and stars "as if in their presence, asking them whether they enjoy looking on empty soil: instead they should flood those greedy for land with the sea" (*solem inde suspiciens et cetera sidera vocans quasi coram interrogabat vellente contueri inane solum: potius mare superfunderent adversus terrarum ereptores*). Boiocalus therefore invokes the sun and stars as gods who should punish this injustice. But Avitus, though moved by the speech, announces with no ceremony that "they must put up with the rule of their betters" (*patienda meliorum imperia*), and that "it has been pleasing to the gods they invoke that judgment about what to give and take away remain with the Romans, and that the Romans allow no other judges than themselves" (*id dis quos implorarent placitum, ut arbitrium penes Romanos maneret quid darent quid adimerent, neque alios iudices quam se ipsos paterentur*). Despite a superficial similarity to the circumstances of Cerialis's speech, Avitus's could not be more different. He expresses unambiguously the nature of Roman supremacy, to the point of Romanizing the gods that Boiocalus supplicates. Boiocalus invokes them directly as familiar deities upon whom he can call to administer justice; Avitus uses the passive *id . . . placitum* to state as a matter of fact the alignment of these gods with the Roman cause.

Compare Avitus's understanding of the gods with Cerialis's. The latter compares the alternation between good and bad emperors to the changes in weather and harvests. As we have seen, admitting that bad emperors exist does not do much for his argument, but the rationalization he tries to pro-

vide is that the principate is like nature, and Roman rule like the divine order. This attempt to naturalize hegemony is diametrically opposed to Avitus's simple assertion that the gods want what the Romans want. Avitus does not try to justify himself; he talks as if he were simply delivering the facts. He certainly does not feel the need to put the Ampsivarii on an equal footing with himself. But Cerialis goes on to remark, à propos of bad emperors, that there will be vices as long as there are men (*vitia erunt, donec homines*), again globalizing the relationship between Romans and Gauls and downplaying the fact that while this may be true, it provides scant justification for the domination of the former over the latter.

BATAVIANS TAKE OUT THE ROMAN TRASH

At this point, Cerialis is asking his audience to believe in the principate with the kind of *superstitio* that the Romans themselves have begun to exhibit toward Vespasian: obedience that, precisely because it lacks logic, seeks to ground itself in logic. Between Avitus and Cerialis, Tacitus depicts a change in the ideology of power from the overt assertion of right to the need for rationalization, which leads ultimately to the invocation of some higher power. When the emperor is acclaimed by the army, openly recognized as omnipotent, his people cannot be made to feel as if they have been conquered. The nadir of the civil war is the firing of the Capitol and the battle outside the gates of Rome, after which, Tacitus says, it resembles a conquered city (4.1.3), and again, that it was in a state of anarchy when Mucianus arrived: *Tali rerum statu, cum discordia inter patres, ira apud victos, nulla in victoribus auctoritas, non leges, non princeps in civitate essent, Mucianus urbem ingressus cuncta simul in se traxit* ("When things had reached this impasse, when the senators squabbled, the beaten were angry, and there was no authority even among the victors; when there were no laws, no princeps in the city, Mucianus upon entering immediately arrogated all business to himself," 4.11.1). The juxtaposition of *leges* and *princeps* is ambiguous; the asyndeton suggests an opposition that Mucianus's behavior bears out. The new face of power has little to do with law, which we have seen embodied in the senators' futile speeches of accusation against one another. Indeed, an important feature of the Flavians as depicted in the *Histories* is that they do not talk. Mucianus has one speech, in which he encourages Vespasian to seize *imperium* for himself, but apart from that none of the coalition addresses anyone at length, either directly or indirectly. This fact is particularly conspicuous after Mucianus's and

Domitian's arrival at Rome (4.40), where Domitian gives only a very short speech of self-introduction and Mucianus says nothing. They also encounter a welter of speeches from litigious senators but make no speeches to settle these disputes. Instead, Domitian simply encourages them to let their old hatred go, while Mucianus speaks "at length" (*prolixè*) about the prosecutors. We do not hear what he has to say, however. Vespasian and Titus hardly talk at all.

After the narrative of Vespasian at the temple of Serapis, Tacitus closes book 4 with Mucianus and Domitian. Mucianus, to stop Domitian from commanding an army in the mopping-up operations of the Batavian revolt, diplomatically suggests that Caesar should not involve himself unless the Empire is at stake. But "since by the gods' favor the enemy is about to be crushed" (*quoniam benignitate deum fractae hostium vires forent*), Domitian ought to let the generals have their victory. We are not told why exactly Mucianus is so adamant (although his understanding of Domitian's character might give us a good idea), only that he has been holding this card for a long time: *sed Mucianus, quod diu occultaverat, ut recens exprompsit* ("Yet Mucianus produced what he had hidden for a long time as if it were recent," 4.85.2). This is a good place to produce it, however, both for him and for Tacitus. Within the narrative, the end of both civil and foreign wars affords Roman *imperium* a new security. The new regime is on its way, and Mucianus understands that power must be wielded from a distance; it must retain an aura of mystery if it is to command absolute obedience.²³ Mucianus the emperor-builder needs Domitian out of the way, not so much because the latter is unreliable as because Mucianus needs to foster the growing association of the princeps with the divine fortune that protects Rome and makes her great, and that is a lesson Domitian learns all too well. In terms of narrative structure, Tacitus closes book 4 by associating the qualities of the Eastern monarch, demonstrated by Vespasian's healing miracles and the history of the god Serapis, with Mucianus's efforts, through Domitian, to craft a certain persona for the emperor at home.²⁴

A comparison of this passage with one in the *Annals* illuminates the transformation of Julio-Claudian ideology at the end of the civil war. At *Annals* 3.47, Tiberius writes a letter to the Senate informing them of the Roman victory over Sacrovir. Explaining why he himself and Drusus had not led the fight, he expresses confidence in his generals, points out the size of the Empire, and says: *neque decorum principibus, si una alterave civitas turbet ** omissa urbe, unde in omnia regimen. nunc quia non metu ducatur iturum ut praesentia spectaret componeretque* ("If some commu-

nity or other made a disturbance, it was not fitting for *principes* [to go out to the front?] leaving the city behind, whence came order over everything. Now he would go, since it was considered to be not out of fear, to inspect and assess the present circumstances"). Like Tiberius, Mucianus stresses the seemliness (*decus*) of Domitian heading up the army under these circumstances: *parum decore Domitianum confecto bello alienae gloriae interventurum* ("It did not befit Domitian to interfere with another's victory when the war was done," 4.85.2). He also recognizes the importance of according the general his due. But Tiberius expresses himself with uncharacteristic openness, to the whole Senate and as a response to criticism: centralized power comes from Rome, which he delicately does not equate with himself, and it only makes sense to bolster confidence by standing firm. The role of the *principes*, he implies, is to remind people of the inexorable power of Roman *imperium*, whose big gun is government and administration first, military second. This is the capacity in which he will visit the front: at the end of the war, to inform himself of the nature of the conflict. And when a particularly fawning senator, Cornelius Dolabella, votes that Tiberius should receive a triumph when he enters the city upon returning from Campania, Tiberius "declared publicly that he was not so desperate for glory, after so many of the fiercest enemies had been tamed, so many triumphs received and spurned in his youth, that now, as an older man, he would seek out the ridiculous reward of a suburban journey" (*se non tam vacuum gloria praedicabat ut post ferocissimas gentis perdomitas, tot receptos in iuventa aut spretos triumphos, iam senior peregrinationis suburbanae inane praemium peteret*, 3.47.5).

Mucianus, on the other hand, wants Domitian entirely out of the way at Lyons, whence, he says, the latter will display the *vim fortunamque principatus e proximo* ("power and good fortune of the principate from close-up"). In other words, he wants the emperor (or Domitian as his surrogate here) to be associated with the now-divine strength of the Empire from wherever he happens to be. The emperor need no longer remain at Rome as an organ of centralized power; Rome and centralized power go with the emperor. They *are* the emperor. In addition, Mucianus says that if the situation were dire (*si status imperii aut salus Galliarum in discrimine verteret*), Domitian should go to the front, but as things are, it is not warranted. Tiberius did not mention going out at all but implies that the great size of the Empire makes all foreign battles look like skirmishes that should be administrated from home. The difference is between a principate that is still nominally republican and one that is about to become overtly

military: Tiberius talks about a *regimen in omnia*, Mucianus about putting Caesar in the field to turn the tide of crisis. It is a profound admission about the truth of *imperium*: one damned battle after another.

Power, then, does not have to talk, in fact quite the reverse. Mucianus is the only one of the Flavian party who has much to say at all, and he is also the most unpopular. When he writes to the Senate, he tells another truth about *imperium*: that it is transferrable, since, as the civil war has shown, it can be fought over and won. This is not a truth that people wish to know, which is why the outbreak of the Batavian war is an ideological godsend to the Romans. The problem of two Romans fighting one another for Rome and *imperium* can be transferred into the foreign arena and made acceptable as a war against outsiders, even though the outsiders bear every resemblance to insiders and want the same kind of power. Similarly, the new kind of authority accorded the princeps will no longer be primarily legal or constitutional, but "superstitious"; that is to say, his power appears supernatural because it derives from no justifiably accountable source. It is therefore not surprising that Vespasian should construct resemblances between himself and Augustus, since both had come to power on the back of civil war and the strength of an army. Augustus's success derived mostly from his ability to command this kind of superstitious belief, as the etymology of his honorific name demonstrates.²⁵

When Cerialis tries to persuade the Germans to stop the war, he threatens: *si quid ultra moliantur, inde <in>iuriam et culpam, hinc ultionem et deos fore* ("If they made any further plots, on the one side would be blameworthy injustice, on the other, divine vengeance," 5.24.2). As in his earlier speech Cerialis expresses the belief that the gods champion the Roman cause and punish all infractions against it as crimes, which is what makes the Romans special and worthy of *imperium*. He ends that speech with a reference to the long history that has contributed to the building of Rome's empire, and the sure destruction of anyone who secures its downfall. For this reason, he says, conquered as well as conquerors should love and cherish the force (*ius*) that ensures *pacem et urbem*; they should learn from the example of those who have tried both responses (*utriusque fortunae documenta*) not to prefer insolence and danger to obedience and security.

These final words demonstrate the rationality of his opening remarks and have the straightforwardness of Avitus's, since they clearly represent the threat of the stronger against the weaker, and the facts about the peace that empire can secure. Taken as a whole, however, the speech consists of a collection of remarks that are perfectly sensible, but self-contradictory because they are enclosed within the wrong frame. What Cerialis describes is

the split between *libertas* and *imperium*, unresolved and imperfectly erased, that exists in the inner circle of the Empire among Romans themselves, whose ideology represents an attempt to reconcile the imperial relationship between people and princeps differently than that which exists between Rome and its empire. On the one hand, Cerialis argues, in utilitarian fashion, that *imperium* for provincial subjects is necessary for peace and progress. On the other, he describes it as inevitable and divinely sanctioned. The former makes sense but does not provide any inherent rationale for why that *imperium* should be Rome and not Germany, particularly when he admits that greed and luxury motivate Roman emperors, too. The latter presents the culmination of Roman history as the natural order of things, which is what the *Romans* need to believe in order to rationalize the principate to themselves. The dichotomy between the two, and the appeal to divine sanction—the ideological equivalent of the classic narrative cop-out “I woke up, and it was all a dream”—represents the Roman problematic; it has little to do with “real” relations with Gauls and does not exhibit an understanding of Gaul as a “real” entity.

The aftermath emphasizes the ideological nature of Cerialis’s narrative. The Treviri and Lingones are relieved because they had been fearing harsher punishment; Civilis sends a letter to Cerialis reporting that Vespasian is dead, that Italy and Rome are wasted by civil war, that Mucianus and Domitian are only *vana nomina* (“empty names”), and if Cerialis wants *imperium* in the Gallic provinces, he, Civilis, will respect that boundary provided that his own remain inviolate. Otherwise he is ready to fight. Although Cerialis does the honorable thing and forwards the letter to Domitian without response, its contents reflect some of the realities of the situation with which Cerialis cannot reconcile his Roman point of view. In his speech, he asserts that the Romans did not enter Gaul to create a *regnum Galliarum*; yet his defense of the area against the Batavian and forwarding of the letter to a higher power, presumably in deference to the one who actually *is* in charge of such a *regnum*, indicate the reverse. Civilis’s letter is the truth of Cerialis’s speech: *this* is the face of *imperium*. No excuses, no justifications, just a simple bargain and a recognition of mutual resources of power. There is nothing special about the Flavians here. Vespasian is so far away he might as well be dead, and Mucianus and Domitian are only names, like *libertas* and other *speciosa nomina*.

As for the Treveri and Lingones, Civilis tells his confederates in the next chapter that the Belgian contingent is not bound to Rome by any ties of affection and can be counted on to side with the Batavian-German alliance, while Gaul itself will provide booty for the victors. Therefore, even though

he had with his speech “reconciled and cheered” these Gauls, who were “fearing more serious measures (*tali oratione graviora metuentes composuit erexitque*), the ugly truth about *imperium* is that a lenient master is still a master, and no invocation of the divine Roman right to rule will keep these tribes in hand if they are given an opportunity that looks as if it has even half a chance of success. As we can see from Civilis’s plans, Cerialis is right when he says that the Germans will prefer to plunder Gallic lands for their richness, but this only makes the Romans a preferable master, not a natural one.

Frankness, then, is a characteristic of Civilis’s letter to Cerialis, not Cerialis’s admission about bad emperors. It represents the discourse of one potential conqueror to another, where no appearances need be sustained: the recognition of absolute power. It is not the discourse that Civilis uses with other tribes that he hopes to make his allies and eventually his subjects, as we see in his behavior during a skirmish with some German tribes under the command of Claudius Labeo at 4.66.2. Unable to overcome them quickly, Civilis takes advantage of a sneak attack by some of his own troops at the rear of Labeo’s unit to march boldly into the fray declaring that he is not there to fight fellow tribes: *non ideo inquit bellum sumpsimus, ut Batavi et Treveri gentibus imperent: procul haec a nobis adrogantia. accipite societatem: transgredior ad vos, seu me ducem seu militem mavultis* (“We have not engaged in battle so that Batavians and Treveri can rule other peoples: such arrogance is far from us. Accept an alliance. I am coming over to you, whether you prefer me as a leader or a soldier”). Like Cerialis’s attempt to reenlist the allegiance of the Treveri and Lingones, this rhetoric oscillates between *libertas*—here represented by Civilis’s offer of *societas*—and *imperium*. It also offers the illusion of oneness not divided into conquerors and conquered. But the devil is in the details: Civilis does not spell out what the difference might be, exactly, between *imperent* and *ducem*.

As a complement to Civilis’s action, in the next chapter his Gallic ally Julius Sabinus abandons the last vestiges of his treaty with Rome and demands that he be hailed “Caesar.”²⁶ This act could not make clearer that the model adopted by the revolt is that of Rome; Roman imperialism has set the standard for the exercise of power throughout northern Europe. The relationship that Tacitus develops between Romans and the states in revolt is therefore not merely mimetic but doubly reflexive: “We” (*nos*, in Tacitus’s ideological usage) view the barbarians as an inverted picture of ourselves—as can be seen in Cerialis’s depiction of Germans versus Romans—but they turn out to be a reflection of our own problem. Thus both

Cerialis's and Civilis's rhetorics of equality are unwittingly close to the mark. They employ them as ideologically based justifications for the supremacy of their own power, but, like a Freudian slip, they say what they do not mean: that everyone has and makes the same claim to power. Representing the speech of the master in this way, Tacitus demonstrates that even the empowered subject is mastered by his own discourse and does not recognize his own thoroughly ideological position. But Tacitus himself, by depicting this revolt as a process of double reflection, takes the ironic position of the subject reflecting on himself, who is profoundly pessimistic about the possibilities confronting his country. Although the *Histories* breaks off with the end of civil war, and a new time of prosperity is on the way, and although Tacitus writes under similar conditions after the death of Domitian, the form and content of his history assure us that a structure so riven as the principate, which now relies upon *superstitio* for its *logos*, surely cannot last. And the conquerors will, indeed, come from the East.

Conclusion

As I look back at this book, I realize finally that it is rather a long way of saying that any society consists of systems of control and the people who live within them and that the two are not mutually exclusive; indeed, it is impossible to separate the one from the other. I was always amazed, for example, at the willingness with which my peers at English boarding school would comply uncomplainingly with the most absurd rules, not because they had to, but because they seemed to believe unquestioningly that the rules were right. The typical response to “Why can’t I do it?” was the tautological “Because it isn’t done.” On the other hand, when I broke the rules I did not put myself outside the system but looked rather for its attention. The more bewildering and nonsensical I found the rules, the more I strove for recognition, even if it had to come from being an “outsider.” It is to this experience, I am sure, that I owe my interest in Tacitus.

Political philosophy since Plato—and even before, if we grant Herodotus and Thucydides the status of philosophers as well as historians of political structures and events—has found various ways to explain the relationship between political systems and those they govern. Hannah Arendt remarks upon the ability of totalitarian regimes to elicit from their subjects an absolute identification with the regime, to such an extent that innocent people will confess guilt and face the resulting punishment in order to preserve the political status quo.¹ Foucault revolutionized the study of power with his research into the forgotten or hidden parts of history, demonstrating that what we think of as normal or ordinary ways of speaking and thinking exist because other ways have been barred. Official forms of knowledge in turn sustain official forms of power. Yet Foucault mostly emphasizes the effects of official power upon the bodies of those who are its subjects: the imprisoned, the insane, the deviant. Much painstaking histor-

ical research allows him to speak authoritatively about these effects, and in turn about perceptions of power. Unlike Thucydides or Tacitus, however, Foucault hardly ever discusses power as a specific governmental entity with a duty and sanction to impose laws, keep the peace, and protect its citizens. For him the idea of power encompasses all repressive or regulative systems, of which he articulates the institutions and apparatuses.

What I have done in this book, I hope, is to show how Tacitus analyzes a particular form of government that responded to a particular societal need. Foucault emphasizes the valorization of certain formal arrangements of speech, and the pragmatic and tangible relations of power that result from this practice. Tacitus, by contrast, recreates with the peculiarities of his narrative the perceptions of the Julio-Claudian regime that existed in people's minds. Thus, to revisit Arendt's example, Foucault would be interested in the disciplinary effects produced by various forms of Soviet power (e.g., judicial, social, economic) that create individuals who respond to it in a particular way; whereas Tacitus would represent the individuals' perceptions of their relation to power by imitating common phrases, beliefs, rumors, political deliberations and machinations.

In order to map this psychological dimension of Tacitus's historiography, I looked to the work of Slavoj Žižek and Louis Althusser, who discuss the intersection of politics and psychoanalytic theory. Basing my analysis upon their interpretation of the Marxist notion of ideology, I call perceptions of power "fictions" and argue that according to Tacitus, people during the Julio-Claudian regime began by creating the fiction that sustained power—that is, by willingly collaborating with Augustus—and over time came to believe it. The reign of Nero represented the height of this paradoxical state, and the civil war that followed Nero's death suddenly eradicated this fiction and the whole Roman identity with it. In this regard, Tacitus and Foucault would agree, I think, that institutions create individuals.

Tacitus therefore conveys the mechanisms of power in some of their most influential incarnations: the images that a society recognizes but misidentifies in its efforts to define itself. Imitating the language of the principate, the difficulty of his narrative gives the reader the experience of misidentification. But the narrative also forms a logic, a guide for understanding this language. The combination of these two strategies means that no privileged place of knowledge nor "objective" review of the historical material exists, because Tacitus accords neither himself nor the reader an outside perspective from which to know it. Instead, he recreates a psychology that at first disorients the reader but through the pattern of the narrative becomes systematic enough to suggest a historical dynamic.

I anticipate criticism for my inclusion of Platonic philosophy. The point I wish to make is that Tacitus writes political philosophy as much as he does historiography, and as a philosopher of politics he draws implicitly on Plato. Yet as a historiographer, too, he has learned much from the latter about making images and about how people understand them. Tacitus's only direct reference to Plato concerns the anguish of Tiberius's soul. He tells us that the emperor writes the following to the Senate, in self-defense for his past friendship with a man accused of various petty crimes, who invokes the emperor as one who will protect him: *quid scribam vobis, patres conscripti, aut quo modo scribam aut quid omnino non scribam hoc tempore, di me deaeque peius perdant quam perire me cotidie sentio, si scio* ("What I should write to you, senators, or how I should write, or what I should altogether not write at this time, may the gods and goddesses destroy me in a worse way than I feel I perish everyday if I know," 6.6). Tacitus infers from this letter that Tiberius's crimes have returned to haunt him and cites Socrates from the *Gorgias* (524d7–525a7) to describe the state of Tiberius's soul: *adeo facinora atque flagitia sua ipsi quoque in supplicium verterant. neque frustra praestantissimus sapientiae firmare solitus est, si recludantur tyrannorum mentes, posse aspici laniatus et ictus, quando ut corpora verberibus, ita saevitia, libidine, malis consultis animus dilaceretur* ("His crimes and iniquity had turned into punishment for him. Nor in vain was the man most outstanding in his wisdom accustomed to assert that if the minds of tyrants were revealed, they could be seen to be scarred and beaten, just as when bodies are torn by beatings, so the soul by cruelty, lust, and evil intentions," 6.6).

In this case, Socrates talks about the state of the tyrant's soul in the context of a myth. He narrates how Zeus took away the outward attributes of the dead before they encountered their judges so that the latter would not be fooled by beauty or wealth into thinking that a wicked person was good. He made the judges similarly naked so that they would listen and understand to the cases brought before them with unclouded judgment. Thus the dead and their judges encounter one another only with their souls, which have been stripped of the material trappings by which people are usually judged in life. But Socrates also says that just as the body in death retains the characteristics it had in life, such as tallness, fatness, or scars from beatings, the soul too retains the characteristics that become stamped upon it as the result of the actions of the body. The evil soul will therefore show the signs of beatings and other punishments. Yet Socrates omits to specify whether these signs are the result of wrongdoing, or the punishment thereof. He also contradicts his previous statement, about the necessity of

separating the soul from the body so that the soul can be seen stripped of all physical marking, which would in any case imply that there was nothing to be seen, and therefore judged, on the soul at all.

In fact Socrates introduces to his unwitting interlocutors an image (myth) of justice that encourages them to believe in the soul as a phantom image of the body. Their belief satisfies their desire to understand the image of justice as the truth of it, because he shows them an image of justice as punishment and the tangible marking of the punished. Yet the inconsistencies in Socrates's account illustrate his interlocutors' misidentification of the image. Socrates therefore makes an image not only of justice, but also of his interlocutors' erroneous belief. Tacitus's formulation of the problem illuminates a further problem in Socrates': when the former says that the soul is marred by "cruelty, lust, and evil intentions," just as the body is "torn by beatings," he does not specify whether these beatings are just or unjust. If unjust, presumably the scar would be upon the soul of the beater, not the beaten, and so the analogy would not work. The connection between the three elements Tacitus mentions—the tyrant, the soul of the evildoer, and the body of the beaten—is similarly unspecific.

What does Tacitus tell us by citing the *Gorgias*? This apparently off-the-cuff reference to a *locus classicus* is less of a gnomic statement about tyranny than it is a reflection of how to understand Tiberius. Tiberius's letter expresses his *aporia* in the face of an impossible situation: he must account to a judicial body for his incrimination by one who invoked him as a higher power than the judicial body to whom he is supposedly accountable. He says that no words exist for his position, or, rather, that if he knew what they were, the gods should annihilate him. He thus makes a false comparison between this and his current situation (*magis . . . quam*), since he already "perishes everyday" (*perire . . . cotidie*). Like Socrates' myth that shows up the false belief of his interlocutors, Tacitus makes of Tiberius himself an image of the false belief of the Senate. The primary reason for these trials is the paranoia of the princeps; but, though the Senate knows what power Tiberius wields, it still expects and accepts from him a statement that will confirm its own largely illusory power.

When Tacitus says that Tiberius's crimes had turned into punishments for himself, he again expresses the "no exit" dilemma that faces the princeps: by his very existence he is a criminal and therefore always faces punishment. Tacitus's formulation of the dilemma mirrors the *aporia* Tiberius exhibits in the letter, and the ensuing image of Socrates mirrors both, for it is not so much the content of the Plato citation that matters, as the notion of the deceptive image that it represents. With it, Tacitus appears to com-

ment negatively upon Tiberius's character and position, implying that as a tyrant his soul is necessarily marked; but because, like Socrates, he does not clarify how crime and punishment come to mark the soul, the inconsistency itself represents for us the error in assuming such a thing about Tiberius. Tiberius himself vanishes; Tacitus shows us that he is an impossible person, and thereby comments upon the nature of a power structure that relies so heavily upon a fiction to sustain itself.

Socrates often uses inconsistent images and arguments to which his interlocutors assent and then find themselves in dialogic trouble later on. Racine called Tacitus "the greatest painter of antiquity" (*le plus grand peintre de l'antiquité*).² As Tacitus's interlocutors, if we remain wary of illusions, we may glimpse both the appearance of the past, and the truth of historiography. For Socrates, the tyrant is the man whom the illusion of the Cave most thoroughly deceives, and the philosopher the one who occupies the paradoxical position between knowing the nature of illusion and living the experience of it. Tacitus may perhaps be described as the historian of the Cave: he writes the narrative of the former from the perspective of the latter.

Notes

INTRODUCTION. BELIEF AND MAKE-BELIEVE

1. "Et quel style! Quelle nuit toujours obscure! Je ne suis pas un grand latiniste, moi, mais l'obscurité de Tacite se montre dans dix ou douze traductions italiennes ou françaises que j'ai lues. Et j'en conclus qu'elle lui est propre, qu'elle naît de ce qu'on appelle son génie autant que de son style; qu'elle n'est si inséparable de sa manière de s'exprimer que parce qu'elle est dans sa manière de concevoir. Je l'ai entendu louer de la peur qu'il fait aux tyrans. Il leur fait peur des peuples, et c'est là un grand mal pour les peuples mêmes. N'ai-je pas raison, monsieur Wieland? Mais je vous dérange; nous ne sommes pas ici pour parler de Tacite. Regardez comme l'empereur Alexandre danse bien."

2. Cf. Moles (1993), who grapples fruitfully with this problem. Moles uses the metaphor of surgery to describe the attempt to slice away "literary" elements of the historiographical text in order to attain the "factual" ones: "You may or may not succeed . . . but it will always be a messy business: you may take out more than you bargained for, and you cannot always be sure even which organ you should be pulling out" (114). More recently, see Potter's (1999) investigation into the textual elements of ancient historiography.

1. AN ANATOMY OF MAKE-BELIEVE

1. On the importance of the alternative explanation in Tacitus, see Develin 1983 and Sullivan 1975/76. In accordance with their interpretations, I assume for the purposes of my argument that Tacitus gives greater weight to the second of the two explanations, but it should be noted that he nowhere explicitly states his opinion on the subject.

2. In addition to Keitel, see Adams 1973; on Otho more generally, Perkins 1993.

3. For the schism between the appearance of republican institutions and the reality of autocracy as articulated by Tacitus, see von Fritz 1957. The difference between Augustus and the rest of the Julio-Claudians was that the image he

created could only work properly with him in it. After he died his successors, forced to play his role, were governed by the logic of the fiction as it started to take on a life of its own. By the death of Nero it was completely out of control. In this sense, Augustus's successors' abuses of power happened less because of their individual insanities or inabilities than because their legacy was destined to drive them crazy.

4. Heubner's text follows M but also consistently includes readings from A, which he signals with angle brackets; hence the oddity of "*simulatio*." I reproduce it for consistency of citation.

5. Cf. also 3.58.2, where the knights and freedmen offer help to the beleaguered Vitellius: *ea simulatio officii a metu profecta verterat in favorem* ("That pretense of duty that had originated in fear had changed to favor").

6. The phenomenon of the false Nero is important for this study and will receive frequent mention. I give a sustained analysis in chapter 3, where I discuss the theme of imposters in general.

7. Clemens is also "made" Agrippa by virtue of Sallustius Crispus's role in the event, as the latter had been summoned to deal with the problem of the real Agrippa Postumus (*Ann.* 1.6.6).

8. Plass 1988, 121.

9. Cf. Zizek 1991, 11–12, on the Hans Christian Andersen story.

10. Cf. Freud 1960, 103–7. Among my many debts to Ellen O'Gorman is the observation that *quo modo tu Caesar* also refers to Tacitean narrative, which in emphasizing the darkness and secrecy attendant upon Clemens's success has "made" both the false Agrippa and Tiberius. Thus Clemens momentarily reveals Tacitus's own fiction.

11. Sullivan 1975/76.

12. But see Marincola 1997, 93–95, for the view that although Tacitus's alternative versions lend him credibility by avoiding the appearance of omniscience, they actually demonstrate that "truth is almost always to be found beneath the characters' professions" (95).

13. For the importance as a "historical fact" of what people at the time believed, and for parallels between Germanicus and Piso, see Pelling 1993.

14. Zizek 1989, 60.

15. Cf. Hegel's concept of repetition in history (1991, 29–31) and Zizek's critique (1989, 60–62).

16. Cf. Maltby 1991, 187 and 192–93.

17. Zizek 1989, 61.

18. Cf. Lacan 1977, 286, for the constitution of the subject through his desire for the Other.

19. Althusser 1994, 135.

20. About the encompassing nature of ideology, Althusser (1994, 131) remarks "*it is nothing but outside*," even though "*it has no outside* (for itself)."

21. Of course Tacitus also reports speeches of Romans in *oratio obliqua*, but in this particular instance the emphasis on these foreigners' relations with

Romans makes direct, and therefore more immediate, speech desirable for Segestes, who has a Roman perspective, and vice versa for Arminius.

22. *Hominum* is a difficult reading, accepted by Furneaux and Fisher, but not Goodyear and Heubner. It is also the most interesting reading and appears consonant with Tacitus's vision of imperial history.

23. Or even more recent history, as in the deaths of Tiberius and Claudius.

24. Cf. Zizek 1989, 45. Tacitus's obituary of Arminius constitutes a response to Livy's desire for the past as an escape from the present: *ego contra hoc quoque laboris praemium petam, ut me a conspectu malorum quae nostra tot per annos vidit aetas, tantisper certe dum prisca illa tota mente repeto, avertam, omnis expers curae quae scribentis animum, etsi non flectere a vero, sollicitum tamen efficere posset* ("I [unlike others] shall seek this too as a reward for my work, that I may avert myself from the sight of the evils that our age has witnessed for so many years; certainly for as long as I seek out those former things with complete attention, free from all care that, although it could not deflect the mind of the writer from the truth, could nevertheless worry it," 1.1.5).

25. Benardete 1989, 179–81.

26. The arena in which this problem of representation probably has the highest stakes in our own era is postcolonial anthropological research. See Bal 1993 for an analysis via comparison of an anthropological and art historical account.

27. Tacitus does point out Lucius's unreliability when he says that "the part of informer was given to Lucius" (*datae L. Vitellio delationis partes*, 3.38.2), but what he uses as evidence against Blaesus, such as the latter's popularity, could all be real.

28. Cf. Otho at 1.44, where he takes his fill of the sight of Piso's head: *nulum caput tam insatiabilibus oculis perlustrasse dicitur* ("He is said to have scanned no head with such insatiable eyes").

29. Lucius also tells his brother that it is a waste of time to worry about Vespasian because the armies of Germany and many other provinces are on their side. Instead, he points to the capital itself as a cause of concern; insiders like Blaesus who court the army and people are the real threat. Given the outbreak of the Batavian revolt and the adherence of the Eastern armies to Vespasian, this rhetoric sounds suspect. But Lucius is right, in the sense that the threat comes from the individual who commands the armies and provinces. While it is true that he can be elevated to power outside the city—the *arcanum imperii* Tacitus talks about at 1.4—he is nevertheless of the city. Lucius's comment strikes a chord with another of the contemporary views on the historian (especially on the *Annals*): that he shirks his responsibilities by focusing so exclusively on the psychological makeup of the emperors. Yet for Tacitus, the advent of Augustus means a new logic of power, one in which the individual is paramount. There was one narrative, and that was the imperial narrative; far from expressing the arbitrary nature of power, it tracks a grim and utterly rational trajectory from

one end of the Julio-Claudian line to the other. In the figure of Lucius, Tacitus shows his readers the inevitability of his subject matter.

30. Syme (1958, 573) remarks that under the principate the old republican nobility played a “false role . . . , forfeiting power but ostensibly retaining honour and prestige.” Augustus ruled that the only families who could be called *nobiles* were those that boasted a consul during the Republic, a sure sign that the importance attached to consulship had degenerated. Thus he systematized the weakness of noble families, who no longer had to struggle to assert their position as they had in the Republic, at the same time as he promoted a hierarchy of government subservient to himself. Then many of the *nobiles* were gradually killed off. Blaesus’s father had been the last general whom an emperor had allowed to be hailed as *imperator* by the army (*Ann.* 3.74). His son therefore represents potential rivalry to the claim of a usurper like Vitellius.

31. Woodman (1993, 127) suggests that at *Ann.* 15.48–74 Tacitus uses a dramatic structure to represent the Pisonian conspiracy because of the theatrical nature of the reality in which it occurred; he therefore argues for a “real” theatricality that Tacitus mimetically represents. This argument omits the element of experience, which binds Tacitus’s representation to reality. Compare Tacitus with Livy, in whose text dramatic structures abound: would we have recourse to real-world theatricality to explain them, too? Woodman gives no explanation for why “real” theatricality is an important factor in Tacitus’s choice of presentation, or vice versa.

32. Rousseau 1997, 110.

33. Hammond 1956, 66.

34. In a letter to Curius, Cicero (*Ep.* 7.30.2) begins a discussion of Caninius humorously, saying: “Know that when Caninius was consul, no one dined” (*Ita Caninio consule scito neminem prandisse*), nor did anything bad happen, because he was very vigilant and did not even sleep. But his tone grows serious when he says to Curius: “These things seem ridiculous to you, but that is because you are not here. If you were to see them, you would not restrain your tears” (*Haec tibi ridicula videntur—non enim ades—; quae si videres, lacrimas non teneres*). Cicero pairs “seeming” with “being absent” and distinguishes it from “seeing”/“being present,” but Tacitus’s senators laugh because they do not recognize their own situation; they are as absent from it as Curius is from Rome.

35. Cf. also *defuit* and *defuere*: those who laugh at Rosius do not remember their history, and those who inform against Blaesus and his friends remember it within the context of a simulated reality, expressed by the fakery of Vitellius and the senators in 3.37 and the visual metaphors of 3.38.

36. On this tradition in Roman historiography, see Dunkle 1971; on Tacitus downplaying Vitellius as a stereotypical tyrant, see Ash 1999. Ash contends that Tacitus departs from the tradition about Vitellius in order to concentrate on his effect on his troops: his Vitellius is passive, and therefore incapable of commanding them. Yet she concedes that “Vitellius progressively abuses his position to indulge his desires” (113) and sets an example that his men begin to follow.

37. Tacitus is surely also drawing on Cicero's portrait of the tyrant, particularly that of *De Off.* 3.36, which is closely followed by Cicero's rendition of the "ring of Gyges" story that we also find in Plato's *Republic*. But Tacitus's perspective on the relation of the tyrant to the city is much more Platonic than it is Ciceronian. In chapter 3 of this book, I extend the discussion of Vitellius's nature and the nature of political reality.

38. Benardete 1989, 207.

39. For an examination of the ancient view of falsification as "adornment," see Wiseman 1979, 3–8.

40. Marincola 1997, 1. For this kind of study on Tacitus, cf. Woodman 1993. Although Woodman at the end of this article refers to a "world of unreality from which almost no-one is immune," he dedicates the bulk of the article to the dramatic structure that Tacitus lends the Pisonian conspiracy. The connection between this world and the literary fiction invented by Tacitus remains unexamined.

41. Woodman 1988, 211. In his essay on the credibility of fictional statements, Denis Feeney (1993) seeks to illuminate the criteria by which we separate make-believe and reality. While this is a useful study of literary and cultural categories, it addresses the relationship between representation and the existence of a material reality in purely fictional terms; this is Feeney's aim, to be sure, but an essay that examines the concepts of belief and nonbelief of course raises the question "In what?" Since Feeney finds Newsom's answer attractive—that is, that "*in entertaining fictions (or making believe)* we divide our beliefs between real and fictional worlds" (Feeney 1993, 237)—he clearly accepts the idea of a "real world" outside of fictional representations of it. The question is, What is the difference between our belief in the "real" world and the "fictional" one?

42. Cf. also Pelling (1990), who makes the argument about Plutarch. Pelling wants us to accept Plutarch as a fairly truthful narrator, except for a few lapses in cases where he could not know what really happened, and therefore made up something that "must have happened." But the problem with Pelling's methodology is endemic to this kind of critique: it does not account for its categorization of evidence. For example, he finds Plutarch's standards impeccable when the biographer rejects evidence based on invective (e.g., An- docides' attack on Alcibiades, or Cicero's on Antony), but criticizes him for inconsistency when he accepts Cicero as evidence for Antony's luxury. Pelling treats "luxury" as if it were in itself a historically determinable piece of evidence, when it is in fact a highly movable category whose existence depends upon an individual perspective. Plutarch's interpretation of Antony's "luxury" would require more narratological work to determine the relationship between method and material; it is insufficient to judge a historian/biographer by our standards of "truth" or "factuality" when these concepts are themselves insufficiently interrogated.

43. White 1973.

44. White 1999.

45. Cf. Roth's (1995) remarks in his chapter on White.

46. For a study of Holocaust revisionism, see Vidal-Naquet 1987.

47. Chartier 1997, 37. White (1992, 38) expresses in abstract terms Syme's description of Tacitean style: "Modern or recent history required the maturity, the penetration, and the ferocity of Sallust" (Syme 1958, 202); similarly, Norma P. Miller: "The combination of . . . elements is varied and skillful, and always connected with the content that is being presented" (1969, 112). These observations in fact leave style to the side until it has decided what the content is, and then decide more or less arbitrarily that the style is apt. I do not deny their force, but if style and content are co-responsive, Tacitus's subject matter must be as elusive as his prose, and the relationship between the two must be more clearly defined if we are to understand what version of historical events or what sort of "truth" Tacitus gives us.

48. Chartier 1997, 20. Cf. Chartier's interest in Michel de Certeau, whose work on various aspects of religious law and experience in history treats the marginalized people and practices that acted as "others" with and against which the mainstream defined itself. Certeau (1988) reveals the interpretive operations that the gaps in "official" discourse encourage; in these places, what is not said constitutes an exclusory logic of power. Conceiving history as the development of relationships of power within a discursive framework, he therefore establishes a model for dealing with language and history at the same time.

49. Cf. Althusser's definition of ideology as a combination of "material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of [the] subject" (1994, 127). On this view belief and reality are not separate, nor does an objective world exist as a corrective for subjective, internal representations of it. Instead there are only "ideological apparatuses"—actions organized by practices—that uphold the status quo of socioeconomic stratification. Althusser therefore calls attention to the *problem* of belief, since social, economic, and political "realities" exist within sites of social praxis that are no less tangible for their contribution to more abstract ideals. His concept of ideology shows that "willing belief" has significant sociopolitical stakes. By contrast, cf. Barchiesi's (1997) study of Ovidian discourse in the *Fasti*. Barchiesi argues that the *Fasti* demonstrates the difficulty of labeling poets "pro-" or "anti-" Augustan, as, to paraphrase Derrida, there is no "outside" of Augustan discourse, and Ovid reveals himself to be a product as well as a critic of it. However, Barchiesi polarizes political reality into propaganda/ideology (he uses the terms more or less interchangeably) and some negatively defined other space to which he ultimately consigns Ovid as one who is "capable of clearly seeing the connection between political persuasion and the remodeling of Roman identity" (256). He therefore makes the sociopolitical stakes very clear but handles inconsistently the relationship between inside and outside ideology.

50. Barthes 1989.

51. Althusser 1994, 125.

52. For which, see the mighty but ultimately flawed efforts of Ste. Croix (1981) and Rostovtzeff (1957).

53. Althusser 1994, 122.

54. Freud 1957; Lacan 1977.

55. Herodotus expresses a similar idea in his description of the Getae (4.93): πρὶν δὲ ἀπικέσθαι ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰστρον, πρῶτους αἰρέει Γέτας τοὺς ἀθανάτιζοντας ("Before arriving at the Danube, [Darius] subdued the Getae, who make/believe themselves to be immortal"). It is significant that Herodotus does not say that the Getae merely believe that they are immortal: for him, their belief is the other side of a process of invention.

56. While it is true that the notion of emperor as god did not have official currency during the Julio-Claudian era—Augustus did not proclaim himself a living god—the contemporary *mentalité* must have regarded him as such, or else it is difficult to make sense of Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.10–17, which asserts that Augustus is more fortunate than Hercules, who had to wait for deification until death: *extinctus amabitur idem./ praesenti tibi maturos largimur honores,/ iurandasque tuum per numen ponimus aras,/ nil oriturum alias, nil ortum tale fatentes* ("This same [Hercules] will be loved when he is dead. On you, present, we bestow fitting honors, we set up altars for swearing by your divinity, acknowledging that no such thing will arise at any other time, nor has arisen"). For belief in the emperor's divinity as part real, part show, see Veyne 1992, 317.

57. E.g., Syme 1958, 358.

58. On the definition of ideology as "systematically distorted communication" of this kind, see Žizek 1994, 10.

59. Cf. Suetonius's attestation of Augustus's dying gestures and remarks: *petito speculo capillum sibi comi ac malas labantes corrigi praecepit et admissos amicos percontatus eequid iis videretur mimum vitae commode transexisse, adiecit et clausulam: ἐπεὶ δὲ πάνν καλῶς πέπαισται, δότε κρότον / καὶ πάντες ἡμᾶς μετὰ χαρᾶς προπέμψατε.* ("He asked for a mirror and ordered that his hair be combed and his weakened jaw propped up. When his friends had been admitted, he asked whether he seemed to them to have played the comedy of life well, and he added this verse: 'Since the play has gone well, give your applause/ and send us all away with your thanks,' " *Div. Aug.* 99.1).

60. On the importance of Tacitus's style to his "métaphysique de l'histoire," see Michel 1966, 289. This is a thoughtful study, but Michel does not actually transcend the style/content divide to explore the articulation of this "metaphysics."

61. For details of these, as well as numismatic evidence of them, see Fears 1977, 221.

62. Wellesley 1972, xi.

2. NERO: THE SPECTER OF CIVIL WAR

1. Syme 1958, 368, 370.

2. There is also the problem of whether or not Tacitus meant his two histor-

ical works to comprise one unit. The two were so collated, with *Hist.* 1 described as *decimus septimus ab excessu divi Augusti*, in the 2^d Medicean MS (M), the only MS to preserve *Ann.* 11–16 and the *Histories* (Borszák 1968; Heubner 1978). But the two texts have very different narrative tones, which suggests the individuality of each. Tacitus's project must have changed and developed as the principate of Trajan wore on, so that the relationship between writing, history, and contemporary discourse differs from one text to the other, as does the narrative use Tacitus makes of Nero. The Nero who dies at the end of the *Annals* is not the same as the Nero who walks the periphery of the *Histories*.

3. O'Gorman (1995) suggests that in the beginning of the *Annals*, Tacitus sketches the similarity between himself *qua* historian and the figure of the emperor. Both must at once absorb the power of their predecessors and recuse themselves from it, which makes it difficult to begin either a narrative or a regime.

4. Syme 1958, 146–47. For a similar but more detailed schema, see Leeman (1973), who finds that the beginning of the *Histories* contains the five elements of an ancient historian's prologue: introduction to author; subject; author's approach to subject; author's conception of history; summary of earlier events. For discussions of why Tacitus did not begin the *Histories* with an account of the death of Nero, see Hainsworth 1964.

5. Syme 1958, 145.

6. *inscitia rei publicae ut alienae*: cf. Heubner's interpretation of the phrase in his edition of the *Histories* (1978), where *inscitia* = *inscientia* and *alienae* = "belonging to another." He points out the oxymoron inherent in the juxtaposition of *rei publicae* and *alienae* (i.e., either the republic belongs to the public, or it belongs to someone else). See also Leeman (1973), who emphasizes in addition the *ut* as "ignorant of the commonwealth as it is not theirs any more" rather than "as if it were not theirs any more," which is implicit in Heubner's statement on *alienae*: "das Gemeinwesen war 'Eigentum eines anderen' geworden."

7. It is never clear in any of Tacitus's texts that he thinks the present a time of unmitigated good fortune; indeed, there always seems to be the suggestion that the union of *principatus* and *libertas* is "too good to be true" (Gowers 2000, 26).

8. For *libertas* as associated with "freedom of speech" in the *Histories*, see Heubner's (1978) discussion of Tacitus's preface; also Morford 1991; Jens 1956; Vielberg 1987. For *res publica* as "the principal embodiment of 'libertas'" according to which "the new regime might be regarded either as restoration or as suppression of liberty," and for the most thorough examination of the concept of *libertas*, see Wirszubski 1968, 102.

9. Cf. Fowler 1995 on leisure (in this case, Horatian) and its connection with loss of social responsibility.

10. On the notion of the repression of antagonism, with particular reference to class struggle, as constitutive of ideology, see Žizek 1994, 23–25.

11. See Žizek's analysis (1994: 25–26).

12. Zizek 1994, 25–26.

13. Cf., for example, *Ann.* 16.5.1–3, which registers Tacitus's disgust at the enthusiasm of the crowd for Nero's stage performances; also Pliny's denigration of the "stage-playing emperor" and the crowds who applauded him (*Pan.* 46.4).

14. 1.5.1.5 evinces the same connection between Nero and ungovernable speech in the description of Lyons: *infensa Lugdunensis colonia et pertinaci pro Nerone fide fecunda rumoribus* ("The city of Lyons was disaffected, and its persistent loyalty to Nero made it a hotbed of rumors").

15. For their relationship to Otho, see Chilver's (1979) note on 1.20.

16. In "Talking and the Roots of Terrorism," *New York Times*, 9 May 1995, sec. B2, W. Goodman offers a critical assessment of the association between talk and emotion as it relates to the demagoguery of the far-right militias and the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995: "In a typically acidulous mood, H.L. Mencken wrote in 1929: 'The danger of free speech does not lie in the menace of ideas, but in the menace of emotions. If words were merely logical devices, no-one would fear them. But when they impinge upon a moron they set off his hormones, and so they are justifiably feared. Complete free speech, under democracy, is possible only in a foreign language.' " Mr. Goodman goes on to discuss the influence of right-wing talk-radio shows: "The ground [sympathy for the militias] has been prepared by the ranters of the airwaves. To judge by the popularity and apparent influence of radio and television yakkers, millions of Americans are intellectually deprived or emotionally disadvantaged. . . . Mr. Clinton and Mr. Gingrich had better begin worrying more about the audience than about the performers. Whether the fertilizer comes from Oliver North or Oliver Stone or a white separatist or a black nationalist, it seems to find a volatile following." Nero is not necessarily Oliver North or Stone, but the proliferation of social breakdown and violence midwived by verbal and emotional excess resonates in both situations.

17. Plut. *Galba* 2.1; Suet. *Galba* 11 and 14.

18. Suetonius passes over this event quickly in a narrative that emphasizes the character and fortunes of Galba. Plut. *Galba* 8–9 and 13–14 shows that this uprising was an important and complicated event. But Tacitus's interest in it is the connection that it provides to Nero, not the event in itself. For this reason he does not discuss it in detail, a choice that leads Heubner (1963, 30), following Koestermann, to interpret it as a "bedeutungsloses Zwischenspiel" (see Heubner's note on 1.5).

19. *Accessit Galbae vox pro re publica honesta, ipsi anceps, legi a se militem, non emi; nec enim ad hanc formam cetera erant* ("Additionally Galba's sentiment, virtuous as far as the state was concerned, that his army was chosen, not bought, was a double-edged sword for himself; for his other actions were not made to this measure," 1.5.2). For Galba as the victim of his own planning, see Gwyn Morgan 1992a; as a tragic figure, Keitel 1995.

20. 1.6 moves on to the vast numbers of soldiers who are massed in the capital, having been summoned by Nero before his panic and flight, while 1.7 describes the vicissitudes of Galba's march to Rome. The bulk of the survey that Tacitus says he will give (1.4.1) thus concentrates on the *mens exercituum*.

21. For whom, see also *Ann.* 14.45 (Cingonius, who here appears as a more or less harmless court flatterer), 29, 39; 15.72 (Turpilianus, as consul, mopping up operations in Britain and receiving triumphal honors from Nero).

22. Morford 1991, 3434.

23. Cf. also Chilver's (1979) note on 1.16.7 on the difficulty of reconciling *libertas* here with the *res publica* above. As he points out, Tacitus rarely uses *res publica* to mean "Republic" as opposed to "principate." He does, however, accept the reconciliation but explains it by hypothesizing that the "thought was Galba's own."

24. For the Republic as an "idealized totality" that assures the condition of alienation necessary for the production of the historical narrative, see O'Gorman 2000.

25. Morford 1991, 3432. Cf. *Agr.* 3.1; *Sen. Clem.* 1.1.18; *Pliny Pan.* 8.1 and 27.1.

26. Cf. Morford's schematic: "Its flexible connotations may include *obsequium*, *moderatio*, and *modestia* in political contexts, and *ferocia* in the context of a free people's resisting Roman aggression" (1991, 3422).

27. Later in the *Histories*, Cerialis's speech to the Treviri and Lingones (4.73–74) expresses similar issues. I have reserved analysis of this passage to show its importance within the context of the Batavian revolts.

28. On the misuse of language at Corcyra as a way for Thucydides to destabilize and ironize both terms in the polarized pairs, see O'Gorman 2000.

29. Žizek 1994, 21.

30. Cf. Chilver's (1979) note on 1.21.4

31. On the "myopia" of both men, see Keitel 1991, 2777.

32. By this argument, the eye and the hand would also seem to refer to the "sick" regime of Vitellius that Vespasian inherits and makes well. In the next two chapters, I discuss the sight/Vitellius and touch/Vespasian issue in greater detail.

33. Heiden 1944, 139.

34. Arendt 1979, 349.

35. *Ibid.*, 350.

36. *Ibid.*, 412.

37. Gruen 1996, 194–97.

38. For a summary of the positions on *quam*, see Chilver's (1979) note on 1.31.3.

39. On the status of the specter as a figure of withdrawal, see Žizek 1994, 27.

40. When Syme writes his analysis of events in the *Histories* and how Tacitus shapes them, his method is largely to follow his model, using his own words. The result is even more starkly contradictory than Tacitus's own. At Otho's "harangue" of the praetorians, "his attitude was base and flattering . . . and his appeal combined abuse of Galba with hypocritical protestations" (1958, 153). Addressing them again after they storm the palace in a near revolt (1.83–84), however, Otho "speaks as a military emperor should speak—constrained perhaps to forbear and be indulgent, but firm on the principle of military dis-

cipline and magniloquent about Rome, the Empire, and the Senate" (Syme, 155). In my next chapter, I discuss the irony of this speech and argue that it exemplifies Otho's ability to change his tack at will. However, Syme's apparently un-ironic admiration for this speech engenders two very different views of an emperor in two similar situations, addressing temperamental soldiers whose goodwill must be carefully cultivated. The incident is mentioned again at 183, where Syme transitions from one laudatory paragraph about Otho's speech to the following: "The facts are enough. Otho was not a 'vir militaris', supporting like Sulpicius Galba the plea for order and discipline in the army. He was a usurper, created by plot and assassination, through favor and act of the Guard, and trembling or suppliant when they broke into the Palace. He then behaved unheroically, 'contra decus imperii.' "

41. For *quamquam* to *simul* as also part of what Otho is thinking, cf. Chilver's (1979) note on 1.83.5. Heubner locates the indirect statement as beginning after the dependent clauses, but it seems more likely that all or nothing should be included. Given Tacitus's affinity for reporting characters' thoughts (cf. Otho at 1.21), Chilver's suggestion is credible.

42. For *quamquam* with the participle as a postclassical phenomenon, see Krebs and Schmalz 1907 *ad loc.*

43. Keitel 1991, 2782–83.

44. Cf. Kunkel 1975, 45 on the breakdown of plebeian power already by the mid-first century B.C., when the struggles were not about class but political power among the aristocracy.

45. Žizek 1989, 47.

46. Plutarch (O.3.8), by contrast, accords him only a few lines of praise for his troops' loyalty.

47. For a different manifestation of these themes, particularly *aeternitas* and *pietas*, cf. the phoenix episode at *Ann.* 6.28 and Syme 1958, 471–72. For *aeternitas* as "imperial publicity," especially on coins, see Syme, 208 n.1.

3. POWER AND SIMULACRA: THE EMPEROR VITELLIUS

1. Millar 1977, 368–75; Auguet 1972, 188; Griffin 1984, 110.

2. For the influence of the populace and their use of theatrical spaces to express political opinions, see Potter 1996.

3. Žizek 1994, 27.

4. For a sociological perspective on the problem of Nero-as-actor, see Edwards 1994. Her methodology resembles that of many studies on this subject (cf. Bartsch 1994): it understands the Neronian era as a time that "disrupted the distinction between appearance and reality" (91). The implications of this disruption are then described in terms of "realities" such as social relations, but without an articulated awareness that these realities cannot be understood outside of spectacle. Further, it is imprecise to speak of a "collapse" between spectacle and reality without specifying what is designated by these two terms.

5. Bartsch 1994, 41.

6. Foucault 1977, 34.
7. Henderson 1989, 194.
8. Ehrenberg and Jones 1955, no. 98.
9. Derrida 1976, 145.
10. Although Zanker (1988) never discusses Augustus's use of images in these terms, his analysis would seem to support this hypothesis. Conversely, my theory offers a clarification of the methodological problem Zanker encounters in distinguishing propaganda from "visual imagery." His explanation of the subtlety of the visual program invokes an interplay between "the image that the emperor projected and the honors bestowed on him more or less spontaneously; a process that evolved naturally over long periods of time" (3). The issue is how natural something can be when its procedure is only *more or less* spontaneous. I argue that the visual program represents only a working-out of a much deeper process that evolves within society as a whole, and results from the less spontaneous side of the populace's relationship to Caesar. Cf. Galinsky 1996, 29, 39–41, 150, for an evaluation of what "propaganda" means in connection with the Augustan regime; on the difference between propaganda and ideology in connection with the imperial regime in general, see Veyne 1992, 378.
11. For a study of artistic images that depict Augustus's relationship to divinity and contribute to consolidating his power, see Pollini 1990.
12. It will be clear from the foregoing analysis that Feldherr's (1998) interpretation of Livy's use of spectacle is very different from that for which I argue in Tacitus. For Feldherr, spectacle is almost an entirely positive trope that lends immediacy to Livy's narrative, and thus authority and credibility. It encourages the reenactment of good examples from the past. Feldherr therefore seems to argue that none of the more "deconstructive" interpretations of spectacle, such as we find in the *Histories*, exist in Livy's text, yet his methodology purports to be (at least in part) sociological. The political complexities of spectacle as presented by the accession of Augustus could not have been less complicated for Livy than for Tacitus, though the latter was of course writing with hindsight. Surely the problematic of the gaze was not lost on Livy, even if he also sought to edify his readers?
13. For the blush as a Roman cultural phenomenon, see Barton (1999), who asserts that for the Romans, the blush was a dynamic symbol within a complex social network: "Nothing and no-one was anything by itself. In that hall of mirrors, moments of confusion and tension were the ligaments that allowed for movement, or better, the electrical movement that sparked and signalled movement and reflection" (225).
14. Lacan 1977, 103.
15. Cf. Suet. *Dom.* 18; Pliny *Pan.* 48; Philostr. *VA* 7.28.
16. Cf. Žižek's (1989, 193–99) analysis of "Force and Understanding" in Hegel's *Phenomenology*.
17. Žižek cites a Yugoslav political joke that illustrates precisely this point: " 'In Stalinism, the representatives of the people drive Mercedes, while in Yugoslavia, the people themselves drive Mercedes by proxy, through their rep-

representatives.' That is to say, Yugoslav self-management is the point at which the subject must recognize, in the figure embodying the 'alienated' substantial power (the bureaucrat driving the Mercedes), not only a foreign force opposed to him—that is, his other—but *himself in his otherness*, and thus 'reconcile' himself with it" (1989, 199).

18. Benardete 1989, 99.

19. This scene has attracted important critical attention. For the literary detail that enhances the effect of this scene, see Funari 1989. Keitel 1992 explores it as an intensification of Tacitus's portrait of Vitellius as a tyrant but does not explain how the "reality" of the battlefield is different, or worse, than that of the arena from which Vitellius has just journeyed. Both Funari and Woodman (1979) are interested in the literary implications of what they argue is the recycling of this scene at *Ann.* 1.61–62 (the *clades Variana*). This argument furthers our understanding of historiography as a literary medium, but not of its function as a medium for understanding the relationship between historical reality and the representation thereof. For a refutation of the "recycling" view, see Gwyn Morgan (1992b), who wants to rehabilitate Tacitus as a historian and emphasize (like Keitel) the literary element of the scene as a characterization of Vitellius.

20. Cf. O'Gorman (1993, 148–49) for a discussion of this passage, where she interprets Roman spectatorship as a kind of (psychological) repression of the sameness of Romans and Germans: that is, an expression of the need for difference. But, as she argues, because the Romans' delight in the spectacle of Germans fighting each other is also the result of their fear of German aggression, the spheres of onlooker and object are collapsed "as they meet in the domain of war." However, although the Germans do indeed benefit from Roman civil war at one point (*Germ.* 37.6), they (literally) do not view it as a spectacle. Looking is peculiar to the Romans; although Germany may represent an incarnation of Rome that Rome misrecognizes, it is not yet characterized by the empty gaze.

21. For the doubling of *flexit*, see Gwyn Morgan 1992b, 21.

22. Of eleven instances in the Ciceronian corpus, six pertain to *ludi*; of fifty in the Livian, thirty-seven.

23. Plato's concept of *thumos* seems to have features in common with the Lacanian "barred Subject" (a subject split from itself by its constitution through language) and "*moi-idéal*" (ideal understanding of self as whole). Cf. Lacan 1977, 292–325. But investigation of such a comparison reaches beyond the limit of the present study.

24. Benardete 1989, 53.

25. Cf. Baudrillard 1988, 170, on the phases of the image:

1. It is the reflection of a basic reality.
2. It masks and perverts a basic reality.
3. It masks the *absence* of a basic reality.
4. It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

In the first case, the image is a good appearance: the representation is of the order of a sacrament. In the second, it is an evil appearance: of the order of malefice. In the third, it plays at being an appearance: it is of the order of sorcery. In the fourth, it is no longer in the order of appearance at all, but of simulation.

26. Both words are etymologically troublesome, and the latter very rare in imperial Latin, the preferred prefix being *re-* (Ernout and Meillet 1959, 319).

27. My analysis of spectacle therefore fundamentally disagrees with that of Clavel-L'Évêque (1986), who argues for Roman games and spectacles as the locus of the reproduction of power and social integration. For this view, cf. also Auguet 1998, 184–99.

28. Ash 1999, 105–25.

29. *Ibid.*, 96–105. Pliny associates greed and spectacle when he describes Domitian's proclivity for watching and noting down what people eat, while himself eating in secret (*Pan.* 49.6)—a dynamic similar to that of the emperor hiding behind his blush while noting the pallor of others at *Agr.* 45.3.

30. For *dissimulare* in the sense of ignoring, see also 2.82.1

31. Tacitus says nothing here of Camerinus's demise, but apparently he fell victim to one of M. Regulus's intrigues in 67. Cf. 4.42.1, where Tacitus narrates Messala's defense of Regulus, who was his brother. Here Tacitus tells us that Regulus had engineered the demise of the Crassi as well as the Orfiti. Dessau (PIR1 S 205) links this Scribonianus Camerinus with the son of M. Crassus Frugi, *cos.* 64, who also died in 67 as the result of a charge brought by Regulus (Dio 63.18.2; and see Chilver's [1979] note on 2.72).

32. The name of the imposter recalls the tribe of the Getae, whom I mentioned in chapter 1 as "making and believing" themselves to be immortal.

33. Cf. also C. Amatus, who impersonates the son of C. Marius; a story that takes place in the same book of the epitomes of Livy (116) as the adoption of Octavian and assassination of Caesar: C. Amatus, *humillimae sortis homo, qui se C. Marii filium ferebat, cum apud credulam plebem seditiones moveret, necatus est* ("Gaius Amatus, a man of the most humble station, who was passing himself off as the son of Gaius Marius, was executed because he was inciting trouble among the credulous plebs").

34. Chilver (*ad loc.*) suggests that Tacitus conflates this story with that of the foreign slave Anicetus, who led an uprising in Pontus later in the year and was a freedman of Polemo II, the last king of Pontus before its subjugation by Rome in 63, a story which appears in *Hist.* 3.47. On the "false Nero" phenomenon, see Gallivan 1973; Bastomsky 1969; Bowersock 1986, 308–11; Millar 1964.

35. Koestermann (1963), following Wurm, and Heubner all emend *corpus* to *caput* based on the fact that "executed persons were usually decapitated and that the features described by Tacitus are all facial. Yet *pervectum* is more appropriate to the body" (Chilver's [1979] note on 2.9). The motive for emendation is scant on the one hand, and on the other the rationale distinctly odd for leaving the text as it is. It seems entirely reasonable that Tacitus would describe the facial features of a *corpus*.

36. Tacitus does use the word of Nymphidius when he claims to be Caligula's son (*Ann.* 15.72).

37. The man's actions as a brigand also recall Nero's nighttime episodes, of which it became known that he liked to rob and beat people (*Ann.* 13.25.2).

38. Beard, North, and Price 1998, 1: 317.

39. For a sociohistorical study of Tacitus on the issue of spectacle in the Empire, see Aubrion 1990.

40. For a short study of this passage, see Gwyn Morgan 1991.

41. Plass 1988, 71–78.

42. White 1973, ix.

43. Cf. Ash 1999, 114, for this passage as an indication of Vitellius's detrimental effects on the soldiers.

44. On the rhetoric of pathos in Tacitus's depiction of the death of Vitellius, see Levene 1997.

45. For Woman as the representative of civil disorder, see Joshel 1995; 1992. Woman as the representative of the City appears in several ancient works, notably *De Rerum Natura* 2.606, in which Lucretius describes the headpiece of the Magna Mater as a "battlemented crown." Bailey (1947) comments à propos of this passage that the soldier who first breached the enemy city would receive such a crown as a prize of victory.

46. But cf. Dio's story of Commodus and the ostrich (73.20–21), in which Commodus brandishes an ostrich head and his sword menacingly at a group of spectators attending one of his performances in the arena. Of this passage, Veyne comments that the senators were both spectators and actors, citing it in his discussion of the bond between plebs and princeps cemented by the giving of the games, and the resulting rivalry between Senate and plebs: "The Senate wanted to be respected because it wanted to obey the Emperors in a way that was appropriate to its own political power and material wealth. But a tyrant preferred a plebs whose love he could win, to senators between whom and himself there was mistrust" (1992, 408). See my discussion (above) of the spectacular loop that exists between plebs and princeps—a different explanation of this bond. Cf. also Galinsky 1996.

47. See above, note 46.

48. The role of the emperors in the year 69 was of course always circumscribed by the circumstances of their accession: if their coups had failed, they would have been criminals instead of *principes*. Tacitus comments ironically on the determination of Galba's killers as he remarks that they are setting themselves up to be killed by the next in line: "Nor did the aspect of the Capitolium and the sacredness of the looming temples, and prior and future *principes* frighten them from committing the crime, whose avenger was whoever succeeded" (*nec illos Capitolii adspectus et imminantium templorum religio et priores et futuri principes terruere, quo minus facerent scelus, cuius ultor est quisquis successit*, 1.40.2). Crime and punishment thus also possess the ability to switch roles, depending on whose side evaluates them.

49. Cf. Hardie 1992; 1993.

4. VESPASIAN: THE EMPEROR WHO SUCCEEDED

1. For the comparative culpability of the army and its leaders during the revolution of 69, see Chilver 1957.

2. This greatly generalizes the complexities of the Augustan political situation, for the nuances of which, see Meier 1990 and Eder 1990. However, these two heavily emphasize the trouble Augustus took not to appear to assume absolute power, when the reason behind the trouble was precisely that he did want it. As Meier observes, “The young Caesar . . . had been able to learn from the fate of his father” (63); that is, that achieving the highest demands a great deal of art. For the attrition of the Senate’s powers and the enervation of the *nobiles*, see Syme 1958, 572–73); 1939, 490–508.

3. Plass 1988, 106–7.

4. Solomon 1983, 443.

5. Annas 1981, 73.

6. Benardete 1989, 46.

7. Ibid.

8. Koestermann 1963, on 1.3.5; Furneaux 1896, 183 n. 11; Miller 1959, on 1.3.5.

9. For the dating of this incident, see Gwyn Morgan 1996.

10. Gwyn Morgan 1996, 49.

11. Rostovtzeff 1957, 110.

12. Beard, North, and Price 1998, 1: 181–210; Taylor 1975.

13. Liebeschuetz 1979, 68.

14. Cf. also *Nat. D.* 2.71–72; *Verr.* 2.4.113.

15. Benveniste 1969, 270.

16. Warde-Fowler 1911, 9. Cf. also Beard, North, and Price 1998, 1: 216–17.

17. Benveniste (1969, 278–79), reviewing what he views as the unsatisfactory state of scholarship on the relationship between etymology and signification of *superstitio*, argues that it is the art of divining a past act or event at which one was not present. While this may be the case for the origin of the term (although both of the examples he adduces in its favor are from Plautus), he does not explain the connection between it and the more general use of the term to mean “a state of religious awe or credulity,” generally in a pejorative sense. For a list of the ways in which *religio* becomes *superstitio* (introduction of new and strange rites; arousal of irrational fears, etc.) see Mayor 1883, vol. 2, note on 71.4; on a general note, Beard, North, and Price 1998, 1: 218.

18. Cf. *Cic. Leg.* 2.19: *separatim nemo habessit deos, neve novos neve advenas nisi publice adscitos: privatim colunto quos rite a patribus cultos acceperint* (“No one shall have separate gods either new or foreign, unless they be publicly recognized: let them privately worship those gods whom they received from their fathers”); also Polyb. 6.56.

19. On the importance of understanding these two terms together when attempting to define their meaning, cf. Beard, North, and Price 1998, 1: 215; also Warde-Fowler 1911, 106.

20. Beard 1990, 42.
21. Cf. Gordon 1990, 238; Grodzynski 1974.
22. Cf. Zizek 1989, 38–39, on Pascal's wager.
23. Zizek 1989, 32.
24. Ibid., 33.
25. Garnsey and Saller 1987, 164.
26. Scott 1975, 17–19.
27. On Tacitus's attitude toward Flavian historiography in general, cf. Briessmann 1955.
28. In Alan Bridges's film *The Shooting Party* (1985), masters and servants are represented as having the same beliefs: the aristocrats grasp at the last vestiges of "Britishness" in their concern for such niceties as the proper cuff links, while the poacher utters "God save the British Empire" before dying of a wound delivered by one of them.
29. On the eventual fate of Priscus, see Syme 1958, 212.
30. On the themes of Priscus's speech as the right sort of *amicitia* for the princeps to cultivate, and the role of the Senate in guiding him, see Pigon 1992.
31. Zizek 1989, 33.
32. E.g., Syme 1958, 209, 547; Martin 1981, 94. Cf. also Luce 1986. For the opposite view, Pigon 1992.
33. Zizek 1989, 32.
34. I reproduce the inexplicable *quo* of Heubner's text for the sake of consistency but assume that it is a misprint for the *quod* of Koestermann, Fisher, and Heubner himself in his commentary. My translation reflects the latter.
35. Syme 1958, 521.
36. Cf. Brooks's expression "Freud's Masterplot" to describe narrative as the channeling and release of libinal force (1984, 90–112).
37. Gwyn Morgan 1996.
38. On the difference in transmission of imperial power between the regimes of Augustus and Vespasian, see Hammond 1956, 66–67.
39. On Tacitus's attitude toward fate and destiny as influenced by Cicero, but complicated by human emotion, see Michel 1966, 102–3.
40. On the importance of Eastern responses to Vespasian's success, see Derchain and Hubaux 1953.
41. Loos 1998, 25.
42. For events that portended Vespasian's success as post-factum inventions, see Levick 1999, 67.
43. Levick (1999, 69) is less skeptical about Vespasian's role: "Such political factors do not turn Vespasian into a cynical manipulator of religion and superstition: he seems at worst a willing dupe of stage-managers."
44. Fears (1977, 222) comments upon the shift between Julio-Claudian and Flavian perceptions of the princeps as divinely connected. The former imagine the princeps as protected and favored by Jupiter, especially in military campaigns. Domitian, by contrast, introduces iconography of himself as having been divinely *chosen* to rule. While Vespasian seems to have dropped the sto-

ries of omens and supernatural events from his self-representation after his accession, it does not necessarily follow that they were dropped from popular perception of his regime. Though he may not have actively employed the discourse of “the divinely elected ruler,” it obviously flourished to the point where it is regularly attested from Domitian onward—a good example of the distinction to be made between “propaganda” and “ideology.”

45. Manning 1975; Yavetz 1969. I emphasize “dream,” because neither the popular conception nor Nero’s cultivation of it had anything to do with a literal democratizing of the political process.

46. Pliny *Pan.* 66.4; *Hist.* 1.1.4. For numerous examples of these paradoxical expressions, see Plass 1988, esp. chap. 3, “Techniques of Wit.” Plass also suggests that the source for Tiberius, for both Dio and Tacitus, was probably “not a single work but a more fluid, anonymous tradition that rose in the course of the early Principate, ‘the talk and opinions of a large group—the upper classes.’ Cf. also Syme, 1958: 272; 299. Such talk and opinion would have included a great deal of hostile wit, and the theme of Tiberius’ two-facedness must have been a rich source of jesting on the formal absurdity of imperial politics” (109).

47. Cf. Adcock 1959, 93, on the *lex de imperio Vespasiano*: “The old order of things whereby the position of the princeps rested partly on legal commission, partly custom and partly the possession of *auctoritas* was altered. There is no longer a kind of compromise between Republican institutions and Imperial practice. There is the formal comprehensive recognition of the constitutional right of the princeps to be, in law as well as in fact, the ruler of the State.”

48. For a full discussion of the traditions surrounding the gods mentioned in connection with this event, see Heubner 1963, note on 4.84.5.

49. Fears 1977, 218–21.

50. For the significance of the cult of Serapis for the Ptolemaic dynasty in general, see Heubner 1978, note on 4.83.1.

51. Fears 1977, 218.

52. Cf. Levick 1999, 69: “The vision legitimated him as the protégé of a deity once of particular importance to upper-class Greeks.”

53. Cf. Bayet 1969, 192–93. On the divine status of Julius Caesar, see Ehrenberg’s (1964, 153–54) interpretation of Cicero’s *Philippics* 2.110 and 13.41.47.

54. Fears 1977, 258.

55. Tacitus favors a more ancient date for the founding of this temple than Pausanias (8.5.3 ad 53.7), who says that it was founded by Agapenor on his way home from Troy. The name “Tamiras,” accorded by Tacitus to the priestess, comes from Accadian inscriptions denoting a Palestinian fertility goddess and might therefore be extrapolated from the name of the deity. See Heubner 1963, 32.

56. Cf. Charlesworth (1937) on Philo’s panegyric to Augustus (“the man who led disorder into order”) and his use of the word *pronoia* for the loving forethought of God, which is post-Augustan, the Jews not having had such a word or concept previously. This concept of “Providence,” according to

Charlesworth, occurs to Philo because of the earthly model of the emperor; it also “tended to make thinkers view with increasing favour the theory of a universe regulated by the forethought of one supreme god. *Providentia* cannot be thought apart from *Monarchia*” (120).

57. Dicey describes an incarnation of this phenomenon in his discussion of the change that occurred in the British concept of imperialism between 1865, when it signified “Caesarism” or autocracy and was always pejorative, and 1905, when it became associated with the wish to “maintain the unity and increase the strength of an empire which contains within its limits various more or less independent States” (1905, 448). Belief in imperialism at that time, as instantiated in the crowning of Nelson’s column and the laudatory writings of Froude and Kipling, for example, was driven by “the power exerted by a kind of sentiment which it is extremely hard to express in terms of utilitarian philosophy. Imperialism is to all who share it a form of passionate feeling; it is a political religion, for it is public spirit touched with emotion” (Dicey, 454).

58. Both formulated in Zizek 1989, 32–33.

59. Ash (1999, 132) argues that Vespasian’s credulity in omens demonstrates his weakness as a ruler and openness to manipulation, as well as that the connotations of enslavement in the prophecy are “unsettling” in light of Vespasian’s later claim to have liberated Romans from the tyranny of Vitellius. She emphasizes “the fragility of the Flavian triumph”; but this interpretation accounts only for similarities between the overt actions and reactions of the Flavians and those of the previous three pretenders. It does not explain the levels of psychological insight that Tacitus gives us obliquely in the narrative, and that draw out the differences in each pretender’s attitude. The self-perception of Vespasian, “weak” or not, plugged successfully into sociopolitical relations where the others’ did not. The fallacy lies in separating the leader from the system, when Tacitus shows us that leader and system are mutually constitutive.

60. Chilver (1979) interprets the expression as part of Tacitus’s “growing antipathy to things Greek” (note on 2.4.2), on which see also Syme 1958, 512–13. This interpretation may be sound, but it does not account for the narrative use to which Tacitus puts the antipathy. In this passage, it underlines the connotations of *adfingit*.

61. Cf. Charlesworth’s (1937, 115) reference to the legend of a coin struck by Hadrian: *HILARITAS POPULI* (“The Joyousness of the Roman People”).

62. Cf. Versnel’s summary of the distinction between magic and other aspects of religion: “Reality . . . generally displays a continuum” between the extremes of “manipulative-coercive versus emotional-supplicatory attitudes as the essential distinction between magic and (other components of) religion” (1991, 181).

63. Beard 1990, 48.

64. Beard, North, and Price 1998, note on 1.361.

65. Cf. the example of John F. Kennedy, Jr.: pictured on the cover of every newspaper, after the assassination of his hero-father, as a three year old bravely saluting the coffin, he himself dies young in a small-plane crash off the New

England coast. Papers all over the world headline the “curse of the Kennedys”; on 24 July 1999, the day after his burial at sea, the New York paper *Newsday* runs the picture again. John F. Kennedy Jr.’s fate was sealed by that first photograph, and the public opinion of him fixed, regardless of the actual vicissitudes of his life (which displayed nothing extraordinary). His death fulfills the prophecy captured in that first picture.

66. Tacitus’s analysis of the Roman and Jewish interpretations differs subtly but essentially from that of Suetonius or Josephus, for whose accounts his otherwise supplies corroboration: both the narrative and the Jews arrogate the prophecies, but the latter are condemned for so doing. Unlike the other two sources, who clarify that *as it turned out* the prophecies referred to the Romans (Suetonius) or give a specific reason why Vespasian is the right candidate (Josephus: Vespasian was named emperor on Jewish soil), Tacitus’s narrative does not account for why the Jews are a *gens superstitioni obnoxia, religionibus adversa* for believing as they do about the prophecies, while the Romans are not.

67. From a letter to the Reverend John Roget (Romilly 1842, 199–200).

68. Beard, North, and Price 1998, note on 2.260.

69. Cf. the description of *superstitio* as “ambiguous between two meanings: excessive forms of behavior, that is ‘irregular’ religious practices (‘not following the customs of the state’) and excessive commitment, an excessive commitment to the gods” (Beard, North, and Price 1998, note on 1. 217).

70. Cf. also in the next chapter (1.74) the charge against Granius Marcellus for having cut off the head of a statue of Augustus and replaced it with that of Tiberius.

71. Zizek 1989, 35.

5. A CIVIL DISTURBANCE: THE BATAVIAN REVOLTS

1. Certeau 1988, 73.

2. Grodzynski 1974, 44.

3. Syme 1958, 686.

4. Book 4 also occupies a place of importance as the introduction to the second half of the first hexad. In the *Annals*, Tacitus begins book 4 with the description of Sejanus, who plays a major role in the rest of the hexad (i.e., for the rest of Tiberius’s life).

5. Tacitus’s principal source for the revolt appears to have been Pliny the Elder, who was eager to whitewash Flavian interaction (Syme 1958, 174–75). Cf. also Brunt 1960, 503.

6. Cf. also Wellesley 1989, 157.

7. Levick describes the letter as “necessarily composed weeks before the final victory, at latest in November after [Vespasian] heard of the victory at Cremona, but designed for this occasion” (1999, 80).

8. Hammond 1956, 76; Brunt 1960.

9. Wellesley 1989, 206.

10. Cf. Murison 1993.

11. Cf. O’Gorman 1993. Her article systematizes the ways in which Tacitus’s *Germania* illustrates the Roman attempt to “find his native land in Germany” (151). She argues that this attempt is doomed because the idea of “Rome” itself is an unstable one, and Tacitus articulates instability in the narrative of his ethnography. Evidence from the *Histories*, however, suggests that Tacitus does more than mimetically unseat Roman ideology. O’Gorman ends her piece with an examination of the end of the *Germania*; her last word is “futility”: (“The seeker finds only the all too familiar and the irremediably strange, which merge into one another and result not only in the failure of understanding . . . but its very futility,” 154). If we are guided by the *Histories*, more is at stake. The Roman perception of the Other—Batavian, German, Gallic—is not a dead end but a dynamic restructuring of its own self-perception; while the self-perception of the Other comprises its reflections upon and distortions of knowledge of Rome.

12. Though according to Wellesley (1972, 139 n.45), the divorce happened many years before the uprising and can hardly have contributed to Venutius’s motivations. Tacitus is telescoping the narrative. On the history of this tribe, see Hanson and Campbell 1986.

13. On this uprising in Britain, see Richmond 1954; Mitchell 1978.

14. The others, not including those found in *oratio recta* and where Tacitus refers to himself, comprise the following: 1.2.6; 1.3.11; 3.47.11; 3.72.3; 4.13.6; 4.18.20; 4.27.5; 4.33.11, 21; 4.35.1; 4.37.14; 4.54.5; 4.67.4; 4.83.1; 5.4.3; 5.6.5; 5.14.1; 5.15.1, 15; 5.17.1.

15. Keitel 1993.

16. Wirszubski 1968, 125.

17. For *principatus* and *securitas*, see Wirszubski 1968, 158–59.

18. For censorship under Augustus, see Seneca on the burning of Titus Labienus’s books (*Controversiae* 10.4–8); Tacitus on the banishment of Cassius Severus (*Ann.* 1.72.3); also Crook 1996, 70–112.

19. Cf. also *Agr.* 3, where Tacitus adds the expulsion of the philosophers to the list of outrages, and *Suet. Ner.* 3, where Agrippina forbids him the study of philosophy.

20. Keitel 1993, 57.

21. Martin 1981, 99.

22. Syme 1958, 453.

23. Like Deioces in *Hdt.* 1.99, the less accessible the new ruler appears, the more authority and credibility he will command.

24. The actual end of book 4 is a description of Domitian’s *dissimulatio*: having tried and failed to foil Mucianus and suborn Cerialis into handing over the army to him, perhaps in order to rise against his own father, he assumes an air of *simplicitas* and *modestia* (delightfully translated by Wellesley as “assuming an ingenuous air of abstraction and looking as if butter would not melt in his mouth) and feigns an interest in literature. If the *Histories* did indeed contain twelve books, and Syme is correct in assuming that books 9–12 would

have treated the reign of Domitian, Tacitus closes the first and opens the last third of the text with him. In this case he assumes a far greater importance at this point than the extant text would indicate.

25. I.e., “consecrated by *augures*” (Beard, North, and Price 1998, 1: 182).

26. Cf. 4.55.1, where we learn that Sabinus boasts of being a descendent of Julius Caesar through his great-grandmother, whom he alleges was Caesar’s mistress during the Gallic War.

CONCLUSION

1. Arendt 1979, 308.
2. Cited by Talleyrand (1891–92, 333).

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Compositor: Impressions Book and Journal Services, Inc.
Text: General, 10/13 Aldus; Greek, Symbol Greek
Display: Aldus
Printer and binder: Edwards Brothers, Inc.